Uneasy Street

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

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UNEASY STREET

OTHER BOOKS BY

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

EYES OF THE BLIND, THE
LOOT
PLUNDER
RANSOM
SPORT OF KINGS, THE

"CARRY THIS, PLEASE," SHE SAID.
"THIS" WAS A DIAMOND PIN.

Uneasy Street

By

Arthur Somers Roche

Illustrated by

James Montgomery Flagg

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TO

MY CHARMING WIFE

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UNEASY STREET

I

THE long mirror held a most presentable figure. It was true that the collar of the coat did not fit as snugly about the neck as Baird would have wished, but one must not expect too much of ready-to-wear garments if one can't take the time to permit necessary alterations. Anyway, it was a moment to which he had looked forward for eighteen months, and he would not be captious. Furthermore, ready-made though the suit might be, it undoubtedly fitted much better than any tailored garment that he might have had made at Donchester. Of course, had he time, he'd go to one of the tailors on the Avenue and be outfitted *right*.

He discovered a sardonic smile on the lips of the man in the mirror. He'd better amend that last wordless statement of his. Had he time and *money*, he'd patronize the Avenue. He shrugged his shoulders—noting, as he did so, that the collar hunched a trifle—and walked to the window. He picked from a chair and tossed upon the bed a pair of breeches and a blouse; upon the latter were the two silver bars of a captain.

He drew the chair close to the window and sat down. Upon the sill he rested his elbows. Chin in palms, he leaned forward through the open window. It was the last day of the last year of the great war, but nature had been merciful to New York. The air was but as crisp as one might expect on an October evening. But, had it been zero weather, Baird would still have leaned through the open window. Below—twelve stories below—was Broadway!

New York's lamp was lighted to-night. Over in Jersey, on Long Island, even to Connecticut, Baird knew, the city's illumination was visible against the sky. New York, with the passing of the war, had come into her own again.

Baird sniffed the keen air greedily. His eyes were avid for the electric displays. His ears drank in the holiday roar from the streets below. It was only seven o'clock, but already the suburbs had sent their cohorts to throng Broadway. With cowbells and horns, with harsh rattles and shrill whistles, with confetti and feather ticklers, the crowds swirled and eddied about Times Square.

It was a sight. Even to a man who had witnessed Paris celebrating peace, it was a sight. For this was something more than New York's annual greeting to the new year; it was, Baird sensed, the city's formal but joyous tossing-away of the burden of war.

He withdrew from the window. Too bad to leave New York when one had merely glimpsed it! But ex-captains of the A. E. F. must look for work.

Not, thank the Lord, that Rodney Baird must look very far. Robbins & Robbins, real estate, Donchester, Massachusetts, had cordially invited their departing chief bookkeeper to return when the war ended. The old job would be waiting. He was lots luckier than a good many of the chaps who had crossed with him, who had gone with him to Upton to wait demobilization. Still— Restlessly he walked to the window again.

The crowd on Broadway was greater now. Every minute it was augmented by fresh hordes coughed forth from the subways. The city was getting into its stride. It would be sort of fun to go out and stroll round. He'd do it! His train did not leave until eleven.

He was struggling into his overcoat when the telephone bell rang.

"Captain Rodney Baird?"

"*Ex*-Captain Baird," he answered. "That you, Jimmy?"

"Yea, bo! James McPherson Ladd, lately second lieutenant of infantry, all filled up with desire to call a captain names. Where have you been hiding, anyway?"

"Only got my discharge yesterday, Jimmy. Beat it into town this afternoon, bought me some new store garments, and a ticket home——"

"Tear up your ticket home," advised Ladd. "New York is home to men of brains. Haven't I been telling you for six months that James McPherson Ladd, senior, needs a willing young partner? And he knows that I'll never be willing. But more of

this, anon, me boy. You're at the Tramby. It will take you one minute to reach the street, ninety seconds to find a taxi, and eleven minutes—in the mob to-night—to reach the Chummy Club. We await you."

"But I haven't any clothes—and who's 'we?'"

"We? Wait—" Baird heard him call, "Eileen, come here and tell Captain Baird how much you love him!"

Baird waited a moment. Then, over the wire, came a girl's voice.

"Captain Baird," it said, "I'm to tell you how much I love you."

"Well, tell me," he laughed.

"Over the 'phone?" she asked.

"Did Jimmy tell you that I've just been discharged and haven't had time to get any clothes——"

"No; he didn't tell me that, but he's told me so much about you. And he's been trying all day to reach you. You'll be up here in fifteen minutes, eh?"

Baird was rather dazed as he hung up the receiver. That Jimmy Ladd should have gone to any trouble to locate him was in itself somewhat surprising. True, Ladd and he had been quite good friends, but he had assumed that their friendship would cease upon discharge. For young Ladd was an heir to millions, and he, Rodney Baird, was a bookkeeper from the town of Donchester, Massachusetts. Not that a bookkeeper wasn't as good as anyone else, but, somehow or other, al-

though laborers had won commissions and college men had failed to do so, the war was over. Things must return to the *status quo ante.*

He colored as he glanced in the mirror. Then he berated himself for his pettiness. Jimmy Ladd was a fine young chap who paid him the compliment of wishing to introduce him to his women friends. Jimmy had waved aside his protest that he had no clothing with him. A lately discharged officer was not supposed—away from his own home town, too—to have evening clothes with him. And, anyway, they could take him as he was, he told himself defiantly.

The defiant mood was still with him as he surrendered hat and coat to the attendant at the Chummy Club. He wore the least bit of a frown as he advanced to the door of the main dining-room. Tall, good-looking, well enough built for his figure to defy the ready-made suit, there was that touch of diffidence in his manner that sometimes indicates modesty, but more often a self-consciousness that is born twin to conceit.

They didn't have Chummy Clubs in Donchester. As he glanced over the crowded room, Baird remembered the Donchester restaurant that had essayed a cabaret. It had not lasted long. The city council had threatened a revocation of the liquor license, and the restaurant had meekly yielded to Puritanism.

But if Donchester had thought that innocuous cabaret harmful, what would Donchester think of the performance going on here now? That girl with

the auburn hair and the hot gray eyes, dancing with the slim, red-cheeked youth! It would never do in Donchester—he was sure of that.

The girl with the auburn hair passed him again. He knew that she spoke to her immaculately groomed partner. Doubtless she was calling attention to his clothing, so out of place among these dinner jackets and tail coats. He looked swiftly away.

And then some one pounded him on the back and breathed fervent salutation into his ears. It was the slim youth, the red-cheeked healthy-looking companion of the girl with the auburn hair.

"I didn't know you in those clothes, Rod, and I'll bet a cooky that you didn't know me. You old son of a gun—gosh, but you are changed! Long pants and lapels sure make a hero look like a bookkeeper!"

It was an unfortunate phrase, and Baird's blush grew more vivid. As though Ladd were far away, he heard him go through the formalities of introduction to the auburn-haired girl. He heard his own voice stammering acknowledgment of his presentation to Miss Eileen Elsing. Quite to his amazement, he found himself upon the dancing-floor, his arm round Miss Eileen Elsing, her face quite close to his. They had progressed three-quarters of the way round the room before the girl spoke.

"Jimmy's a bit of an ass, isn't he?"

"Eh? I beg pardon," stammered Baird.

"Oh, if he's *that* good a friend, I apologize," she said lazily. Her voice was languid, almost

heavy, yet rich and vibrant, too. "But," she went on, "why did he warn me that you couldn't dance?"

"Kindness," replied Baird.

The girl glanced up at him. She was not short. The upward glance, so close were her eyes, had the effect on Baird almost of physical contact. She was not over twenty-four, he decided. Sophisticated as those eyes were, they held youth in them.

"Are all heroes mock-modest?" she asked. "You dance extremely well, and are extremely well aware of it." Again her eyes roamed over his face.

"Thank you," he murmured; "but I wasn't aware of it."

"Oh, you're a bit clumsy about the new steps, but —if you'd let me guide you——"

The gloved hand that rested upon his right arm exerted a slight pressure. Immediately he found himself half reversing and moving backward.

"You see," she said. "With me to guide you——"

"Paradise," he muttered.

"Back with banality from war," she said. "Couldn't you think of something newer?"

"But you wanted *something*, and I don't think quickly," he retorted.

The music ceased. The dancers applauded for an encore while the girl looked inquiringly at Baird.

He nodded, and she led him to the table where Ladd now sat. There were others there, a Mrs. Dabney and a Miss Boffert—the former a much-rouged, plump brunette, and the other a rather bulky girl. Also, there was Mr. Dabney, whose

crisp mustache consorted ill with the black ribbon from which suspended his eye-glasses.

Apparently they were conserving energy against the later evening, for they had not been dancing. Introductions were made with a casualness that surprised Baird, accustomed to the stiff, somewhat self-conscious formality of Donchester. Immediately they were made, Mrs. Dabney demanded the attention of Jimmy Ladd, while her husband leaned toward Miss Boffert. Baird settled himself in his chair. He had read, in Sunday editions, of the Chummy Club. He had heard Jimmy Ladd mention it. Of course, he had known that it was not strictly a club, that it was, at least, semipublic. But that it should prove to be merely a restaurant was something of a surprise.

The room—he judged correctly that there were other rooms, private dining-rooms and the like—held tables sufficient to accommodate perhaps two hundred people comfortably. But to-night there were half as many more here, seated at the tables that were so closely jammed together, or moving about upon the dancing-floor in the center of the room.

Carnival was in the air. Uniforms predominated; nevertheless, there was no lack of wine upon the tables.

Watching the confetti being thrown, observing the toy balloons which were batted around by the enthusiastic merrymakers, listening to the ever-increasing noise, Baird wondered how spontaneous it all was—how much of it was due to alcohol, and

how much to natural ebullience of spirit. For himself, the defiant resentfulness that had possessed him when he entered the room had passed away. It was without self-consciousness that he rescued a balloon from Miss Elsing's auburn head and threw it at a pretty blonde at the next table.

"And without a drink, either," commented the girl.

He looked at her.

"What do you mean?"

"My Puritan friend"—she shrugged her shoulders—"one could hardly imagine you, a moment ago, able to enter into the spirit of this affair. You were frowning, angry——"

"Oh, not all that!" he protested. "I was looking for Jimmy. The light hurt my eyes, and——"

"Why prevaricate? You *are* a Puritan, and you were shocked when you came in here. Well, I hardly blame you. To return from the trenches and find—this." She looked about her, her lips faintly curled, her eyes, Baird sensed, a trifle hard, "And now"—and she laughed mockingly—"you are doing your best to seem a bit bored."

"I'm not," he said hotly.

"No? Are you really bored?"

"Of course not! I—I'm having—a bully time."

"I'm not, then, and I am bored," she told him. Her voice was the least bit petulant. "I warned Jimmy that we shouldn't start out until after the theater; but no—he wouldn't have it. Just back from France and waste time in a theater! Still, perhaps he isn't wasting time here."

Her glance at Jimmy, leaning so closely toward the pretty Mrs. Dabney, was explanatory of her words. Baird could not help casting his eyes toward Mrs. Dabney's husband. But if that gentleman was conscious of the flirtation occurring before his eyes, he was not too concerned about it. The dance-music struck up again. Miss Elsing turned to Baird.

"Are you really a worshiper of the great god Jazz," she demanded, "or do you dance so well because you have no other accomplishments?"

It was a casual impertinence. To resent it would be to dignify it too greatly. Yet he did resent it, because it seemed to him that this girl recognized him for what he was, a bookkeeper stealing a few last hours before returning to his desk. She would hardly, he felt, be as rude to some one in her own class. Her own class! It was his own mental phraseology, but, had she uttered it herself, he could not have been more angry.

"Dancing bores me," he said curtly.

"Me, too, Steve," she said. "Let's get out of here." At his blank look, she laughed. "Oh, don't be shocked again. This is New Year's eve. And we're all to meet at the Central at twelve. If you can't trust yourself, trust me."

He rose with her. They drifted across the dancing-floor together, and out by the check-room. As she put on her wraps she glanced toward the room they had just left.

"Too engrossed—both couples," she announced

shortly. "They'll not miss us until it's time to leave. Carry this, please."

"This" was a diamond pin. Little of jewelry as Baird knew, he recognized the exquisite taste of the ornament. About three inches long, nine diamonds were set in platinum filigree. Five of the stones weighed perhaps a carat apiece; the other four were chips. But it was the lovely flawlessness of the five larger stones that won Baird's admiration. Pure white, they flashed in the electric lights. So brilliantly did they gleam to the furtive eye of an extremely white-faced gentleman about to surrender his coat and hat to the attendant that he changed his mind.

"It's a beauty!" said Baird.

"It *is* effective," the girl admitted. "But I shouldn't have worn it; the clasp is loose. And as a rather dear—a funny little aunt—gave it to me I should hate to lose it. So—you take care of it."

"I'll be most careful," he laughed. He dropped the trinket into his waistcoat pocket. The white-faced gentleman drew a bit nearer to them. The girl looked up at Baird. In her eyes was a certain cool hardness.

"Please do," she said. "I should hate to ask you to replace it."

She did not notice his gasp as she preceded him through the revolving door. Again that resentment toward her possessed him.

Outside, the girl looked up at him. Her hand slipped through his arm. She drew close to him. The coolness, the hardness had gone from her eyes.

She seemed, for the moment, confiding, friendly. Her nearness exhilarated him. He forgot his resentment completely. Three steps, and they were swallowed up by the hilarious throng. So many persons bumped against him that he ceased to notice it. It was a very simple matter for the white-faced gentleman to abstract from his waistcoat pocket the diamond pin.

II

THE Central, while not the city's newest hotel, was one of its most fashionable. The crowd which had engaged tables in its dining-room tonight apparently was made up of exactly the same sort of people whom Baird had seen at the Chummy Club.

It was close on to midnight when Eileen Elsing and her companion entered the main dining-room of the big hotel. Baird marveled at the girl. The girls whom he had left behind him in Donchester eighteen months or so ago would have been brazen to leave a party with a strange man, and wander, unchaperoned, for more than two hours through the crowded city streets. Also, he was quite certain that even had they dared brave the conventions, they would never have braved the city pavements in dancing-slippers.

Yet, as a downward glance showed him, this girl's slippers showed not a fleck of city mud on their satin tops. She was, undoubtedly, of a sort different from the girls of Donchester.

It was all new to Baird. Girls of Miss Elsing's class—it suddenly occurred to him that he knew nothing of her station in life. For that matter, beyond the fact that Jimmy Ladd's father was

wealthy, he knew nothing of Jimmy's social position. It had never interested him.

That Miss Elsing was a young woman of wealth he'd assumed from her presence in Jimmy Ladd's party. Not that, in the school of democracy from which he had just been discharged, a man's money had made any difference. Still, as he'd known for a year or more that Ladd "traveled" with a wealthy set, he had been content with the quiet assumption that the end of the war would mean the termination of a pleasant acquaintance. Jimmy Ladd had, it was true, mentioned once or twice that his father could "use a bright chap" in his office. But Baird had dismissed Ladd's well-meant words with a smile.

But now, after some hours in the company of Eileen Elsing, Donchester began to seem less like home and more like jail. The girl intrigued him.

Hardly had they left the Chummy Club when they were swept away by the hilarious crowd. A well-dressed crowd, too, for the most part. Baird had never seen so many men and women in evening dress outside of a theater or ball. Women wore evening clothes on the street here, apparently on their way from theater to restaurant. In Donchester, evening clothes were "occasions." Here they were matters casual. It was another mark of New York's uniqueness. As far as Times Square they had pushed their way, jostling and being jostled. At first, Baird had wanted to resent the men who leered, who thrust feathers into the face of the girl. But her own good-humored acceptance of the night and its follies had shamed him into

acquiescence. A bit out of breath, they reached the Tramby.

"Let's have a drink," she proposed.

"You're improving," she told him, a few moments later. They had managed to crowd into the Tramby grill, and she had ordered a high-ball. Baird was sipping ginger-ale.

"Yes?" he said.

She drank rather deeply.

"Uh-huh," she nodded. "You're recovering from shock. I should say that you'll be completely cured in another hour or so. You may even order a drink for yourself."

He felt himself blush.

"I drink occasionally," he said shortly.

"Every eight or ten years, eh?" She did not jeer. Her voice, as always, seemed lazily indifferent. Yet Baird read into it something of scorn.

"A bit more often than that," he declared. "But in the army—well, it can't very well be done."

She looked about the room.

"Nevertheless—it seems to be done," she announced. For here, as in the Chummy Club, uniforms predominated.

He made no answer. He suddenly remembered that he had a ticket for the eleven-o'clock train.

A few hours ago, that departure had seemed the only course in the world for him to follow. New York meant nothing to him. But now—New Year's celebrations were a novelty to him. This girl was a novelty. He might never see the like of either again.

"Let's go," she said suddenly. "I want to walk some more."

The waiter brought him the check. Baird smothered a whistle. The Tramby grill taxed its patrons a dollar cover-charge. Of course, it was New Year's eve, but—three dollars and forty-five cents for two drinks! Nevertheless, he flattered himself that he was correctly nonchalant as he gave the waiter four dollars.

At the door of the grill-room, he hesitated a moment.

"I intended to leave on the eleven o'clock for Donchester, Miss Elsing, but——"

She cast him a glance over her shoulder.

"To-morrow is another day," she told him. "The trains will still be running."

Once again they were in the street, buffeted by the crowds. What it was about her that conquered him Baird could not tell. She was handsome, boldly handsome, but he had seen more beautiful women. She had charm, of a sort, but he had encountered greater. That she was a lady, even, he could not be sure. Certainly, the ladies of Donchester would hesitate at drinking high-balls in public cafés. He glanced surreptitiously at his watch. It was ten-thirty; he had time in which to attend to his bags and catch the train. He said no more about leaving. Arm in arm, they fought their way up Broadway.

Jimmy Ladd was waiting for them in the lobby of the Central.

"Swift work, Eileen!" he said, with a grin. To

Baird, "I suppose that you've shouted, '*Kamerad!*' into her shell-like ears?"

Baird colored. He was becoming annoyed with himself at his lack of apt retort, at his easy blushing.

"Hustle," said Ladd. "The crowd's all inside."

A long table had been prepared for Ladd's guests at the Central. Around it were fifteen or sixteen people. This time, Ladd made no pretense of introduction. Dabney affixed his eye-glasses and stared at the late arrivals. His crisp mustache was not so jaunty now, and his devotion to Miss Boffert was more pronounced.

Baird looked down the table. Jimmy Ladd's acquaintance was most catholic. He tried to satisfy himself as to the occupations, the importance, of the persons at the party. He gave it up. Good-naturedly noisy, all of them, the most riotous seemed to be those whose hair, if they were women, was grayest, or whose heads, if they were men, were baldest.

One thing they were remarkable for—their clothing. At least, they were remarkable judged by Donchester standards. He knew enough of women's clothing to realize that Mrs. Dabney's simple-appearing black-lace frock must have cost several hundred dollars. And the yellow gown that Eileen Elsing wore did more than hint of money.

But it was the clothing of the men that amazed him. In Donchester, the putting-on of evening clothes was still something of a ceremony. Men

wore them a trifle self-consciously, as, in an earlier generation, they wore their Sunday suits.

But in New York, practically every one who was not in uniform dressed for the evening. And, somehow, they seemed to be comfortable, to have none of the difficulties with collar and tie and obtrusive shirt-front that always annoyed Baird. Even Dabney, a trifle rumpled now, had in his garb a certain nicety of cut that was foreign to Baird's experience, that rumpling could not take away.

Who were these people, anyway? If quiet was one of the first requisites of gentility—as he had been brought up to believe—these people were not gently born. Yet, it was a celebration. And it was the sort of celebration that Baird would have assumed would naturally have been confined to youth. Only, in New York, there were no old. That, if anything, was the great outstanding fact of the evening. In Donchester, men definitely surrendered their claims to young women at forty. In New York, apparently, men surrendered their claims at death, and not before.

Nor was it, oddly enough, disgusting. He rather liked the old blades of Manhattan. Why should a man yield his patent leathers to carpet slippers if he didn't choose to? The poets sometimes rhapsodized over the graceful slipping into old age. Well, who loves a quitter? And in this city, the home of ambitious youth, he was a quitter who relinquished youth.

Baird saw Jimmy Ladd on the dancing-floor, holding closely to him a pale, blonde girl. Quite with-

out meaning to, Baird cast a questioning look at Mrs. Dabney. But in that lady's eyes was only a good-natured tolerance. He turned to Miss Elsing.

"Shall we dance?" he suggested.

She yawned frankly.

"I'm tired from the walk. What an asinine way to spend an evening!"

"Thank you," said Baird curtly.

She laughed.

"Oh, I didn't mean you. But—all this. To shout and cavort and make fools of ourselves—I simply can't do it without liquor. Join me? It *might* enliven you?"

The barb in her voice, more than in her words, stung. He had been in the girl's company more than two hours—had had her all alone—and the result, for her, had been boredom. And yet he knew, without vanity, that he didn't bore most women. He damned the self-consciousness that, he thought, rendered him tongue-tied with this girl.

He felt suddenly angry with himself. Why the devil had he missed his train? Who was this girl, anyway? What did he care whether she liked him, whether she thought him amusing? As for needing liquor to loosen his tongue, he could talk well enough without it, if the girl only knew it, and—he reached for a glass. Then he reached for another.

Now, an old-fashioned whisky cocktail and a glass of champagne merely open the eyes of some men. Others they put to sleep. Others strike a happy medium. Baird had been absolutely "on the wagon" for twenty months. The whisky and wine at first

warmed him. Then his eyes became slightly blurred and his voice thick. Then his vision grew extraordinarily keen and his voice remarkably clear and distinct.

"Shall we dance?" he asked the girl again.

She eyed him amusedly.

"If you wish," she assented.

The room was stifling. His throat was parched when they reached their seats again. Two more glasses of champagne joined the other tributes to the occasion.

Suddenly the lights went out. It was midnight. The New Year had arrived. The extra glasses of wine gave Baird a fictitious boldness. In the darkness, Miss Elsing lighted a cigarette. Her red lips gleamed as vividly, to his heated imagination, as the flame of the match which she held. And as the match was tossed away and her lighted cigarette came away from her mouth, he leaned forward.

His kiss was returned! There was no doubt about that. The first lips that his own had touched in two years welcomed the salutation. Then, as he would have kissed her again, a pair of soft hands pressed against his cheeks, and the mouth so close to his own was withdrawn.

The din in the room was terrific, yet Baird was unconscious of it. The humming in his ears drowned all external noise. The lights flashed on again. He found himself, with the others standing up, waving a champagne-glass, and shrieking welcome to the New Year. But he saw only Eileen Elsing.

He leaned toward her, but Jimmy Ladd was ahead

of him. He saw her whisked away in Jimmy's arms. Surely no one in the world danced as divinely as Eileen Elsing. Heedless of the invitation in the eyes of other women guests of Ladd, he poured himself a glass of wine and continued staring at Eileen. Dance with anyone else? Not he!

Of course it was all right for Eileen to dance with Jimmy, to dance with anyone. She was perfect. She could do no wrong. And Jimmy—bless his dear heart!—had introduced Baird to Eileen. Jimmy would always be their dearest friend.

"It's all right, Jimmy," he said to that gay young gentleman as the dance ended and the couple returned to the table.

"What's all right, Roddy me boy?" asked Ladd.

Baird beamed benevolently. Genial kindness exuded from him. Some men fight; some men cry; some are happy; some are morose. Liquor is the most versatile thing in the world. No effects are beyond its power. It made Baird tolerant, generous.

"Your dancing with Eileen," he replied. "No objection to it at all, Jimmy. Dance with her whenever you want. I like to watch you."

Ladd eyed his guest critically.

"Gets you pretty quick, doesn't it, Rod?"

Baird nodded heavily, ponderously.

"Minute I saw her—knew it." He placed his hand upon his heart. "Dance, Eileen?"

Miss Elsing grinned at Jimmy Ladd. To Baird, she replied:

"Let's sit it out. And let's have a little something to cool off."

She did not offer the least objection as Baird held her hand.

It was almost impossible to converse any longer. Nineteen-nineteen was coming in with a bang. It was immensely thrilling. What a friendly sort New Yorkers were! Welcomed a fellow in quite as though they'd known him all their lives, and— He tried to say something of this to Miss Elsing, but she evidently misunderstood him. However, she smiled and held out her glass. Baird poured champagne into it.

Some drops fell on the girl's hand. He bent over and kissed them away. He looked up angrily as a shout of laughter came from the end of the table. But it was only that Mr. Dabney had come to life.

The difficulty with the Waiters' Union had resulted in the engaging of girls as waitresses at the Central. An extremely pretty girl had just served Mr. Dabney with something. Inspiration had come to him as he started to tip her.

"Worth just fifty cents, m'dear, if I put it in your hand. Worth five dollars if I put it in your stocking. What say?"

The waitress essayed coyness, but failed in the endeavor. Five dollars was five dollars. She turned slightly to one side; her skirt was raised; into her stocking-top Dabney slipped the five-dollar bill.

No invention of modern history has ever been acclaimed with the enthusiasm that greeted Mr. Dabney's strikingly original idea. There was a yell

from Ladd's table; as explanation shot about the room, hilarity reached its highest pitch. Immediately a dozen girls stood close to tables, while unsteady hands that held bills fumbled at the tops of stockings.

Baird's eyes were frightened as he turned to Miss Elsing. But he reconsidered his offer to take her home as he saw the mirth in her eyes, the broad smile on her lips.

The disgust left his own eyes. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* After all, evil was in the thought, not in the deed. It really, when you stopped to think of it, was something of a lark, this idea of Dabney's.

He reached into his waistcoat pocket as the waitress passed by him. He touched her on the arm. She turned, and her face was vaguely familiar. Somewhere, sometime, he'd seen her. But he could not place her now. He drew her near to him; he tipped her exactly as Dabney had done. The girl laughed, thanked him, and moved on. He turned to Eileen for approval.

"You warm up as the evening progresses," she told him.

Jimmy Ladd was settling with a head waiter for the party. Baird joined him.

"Hadn't we better have more wine?" he asked.

Obsequiously the waiter took his order. Five minutes later, the check was presented. Hotels are rather careful about these matters on New Year's eve.

Baird fished in his pocket. He drew forth several bills. Horror suddenly came to him. Of his army

savings, he had had one hundred and thirty dollars left after paying for his new clothing. Now he had something like seventeen dollars. He had, undoubtedly, put a hundred-dollar bill in the stocking of the pretty waitress. He could feel perspiration on his forehead. What would Miss Elsing think?

"Oh, Jimmy!" he said. "Haven't any money with me—I'm a fearful ass. Would you mind——"

"Surest thing!" And Jimmy handed him a wad of bills. Baird selected a hundred. He paid the waiter. Magnificently he waved the change—a matter of twenty dollars—away. For by now he was talking with Eileen again.

He was in the midst of an ardent declaration, to which the girl listened smilingly, when a slim man, of forty-five, perhaps, groomed to the point of affectation, joined the party. Immediately he appropriated Eileen. She seemed not at all unwilling to be appropriated. Taken aback, Baird surveyed the ivory shoulder that she turned to him. Angry speech trembled on his lips when Ladd touched him.

"Lay off, Roddy!" warned Jimmy. "You've been playing with the same engagement long enough. Lots of other pretty girls here would like to talk to you. And Sam Blackmar is one of these all-or-nothing people, you know."

"No; I didn't know," snapped Baird. "Who is he? Who invited him to——"

"I invited him here," interrupted Jimmy dryly. Then he grinned. "Cheer up, old top! And give the girl a chance. Unless some handsome black-

guard like yourself interferes, she's going to be real sensible and make a few millions quicker than you or I ever will."

"Yes? You mean——"

"Why, I mean that she's going to marry him—if she's sane," said Ladd.

"'Sane?'" Baird's laugh was unpleasant. Jimmy Ladd never knew how nearly Baird came to driving his glass into the other's face. Then Baird laughed again. He lifted the glass, but to his own lips. As Eileen rose and surrendered her slim waist to Blackmar, Baird quietly stole away from the party.

There was gaiety enough in the restaurants and hotels of Fifth Avenue still. The limousines and taxis, whose drivers dozed on their seats as they waited for the revelers, were proof enough of that.

But the street itself was lonesome. He turned toward Broadway, past rows of dwelling-houses, dark, quiet, out of place so near the Central and its kindred resorts, yet suggesting a wholesomeness not observable in the restaurants.

The crisp air soothed Baird's temples. He was conscious of having drunk too much; a bad to-morrow confronted him. The wandering taxi-man who halted beside him failed to win a fare. The air, the exercise of the walk—Baird wanted these things.

But Broadway was little more attractive than the Avenue. Its crowds, too, had vanished. Confetti, torn ticklers, broken horns, dismantled rattles, silent cow-bells strewed the streets. The lights were dimmed. The atmosphere held something ghostly,

something chill. Unconsciously he quickened his steps. He felt, he imagined, as a scrub-woman who comes to a room that has held a banquet must feel. Half-eaten viands, bottles, bedraggled table-linen, scattered chairs— Broadway seemed like this. There is no place so lonesome as a place that has been recently filled with people. No desert is as vacant as a summer resort in the winter. It is because people leave behind them something intangible, something of the spirit that has animated them. Deserts are not filled with ghosts; empty houses are.

Now, in the faint hour before dawn, Broadway, almost deserted of people—though lights still gleamed in the restaurants—was filled with ghosts. Baird quickened his steps. The glamour was gone. How foolish to have seen any glamour there at all!

Yet that attitude was unjust. The curtain descends on the play; the stage is cleared; the scenery is hoisted aloft or piled away. Yet, if the play has been entertaining, who regrets the time spent in listening to it?

So, he had not been foolish to see glamour to-night. If Broadway and the Avenue had been representative of New York—people undoubtedly became intoxicated at county fairs, but does one condemn the fair? To-night, had he been in the mood for it, he would have felt the great reaction from the stress of war; he would have seen a million people expressing their joy at merely being alive. Liquor did not make the celebration; it was merely an inconsiderable portion of it for the great majority.

He stopped at the entrance to the Tramby. The

great majority! To the north, east, west, and even south were homes—real homes, with real people. With kindly people, too. Not one quarrel had he observed in the streets to-night. Kindly, decent people. He looked up Longacre Square. The great hotels, the tall office-buildings—these were the monuments that had been builded by the people whom he had seen at play to-night. New York could be gay, but, in the chill dawn after a night of revelry, one was more conscious of New York's ability to work than of its penchant for play.

He drew in a last breath of air and entered the hotel. It was overheated; he had hardly reached the elevator before the headache that had been threatening him arrived. He was nodding when he reached his door.

He had always been a methodical sort of person, and the army had accentuated this trait in him. Always he placed his effects in an orderly row upon his dresser—pocketbook, fountain pen, keys, money. He grimaced as he counted the latter. Less than three dollars! Suddenly the blur of the evening's recollections left him. Events stood out sharply. He had borrowed a hundred dollars from Jimmy Ladd. Well, after all, he needn't repay that immediately. As for his hotel bill, he could pawn his wrist-watch. His face grew suddenly blank as his fingers, dipping into his waistcoat pocket, failed to encounter Eileen Elsing's pin. Slowly, then frantically, he searched his other pockets. It was gone! He sat down on the edge of the bed. What was it the girl had said? That

she would hate to ask him to replace it? He exhaled heavily. That meant that she would not hesitate to do so, if he remembered correctly the expression in her eyes.

But even if she didn't ask him to replace it, how long would he be content to remain under any obligation to a girl who flirted with one man, *kissed* him, while she was cold-bloodedly planning to marry, *for money*, another man twice her age?

He stared down between his knees. Something protruded from under the bed. He pulled it out. It was a worn, canvas-covered steamer-trunk, small, unfashionable. A porter, doubtless, had put it in his room by mistake. Savagely he kicked at the unoffending box. It disappeared under the bed. Tomorrow he'd notify the office— He'd lost Eileen Elsing's pin. That was the only thought of which he was capable. He wondered what it was worth? A thousand dollars? It was long before uneasy slumber came to him.

III

PAIN is the most vital thing in the world. If conscience worked directly upon anatomy, there would be fewer sinners. That is why drunkards are always much more remorseful than burglars. Drunkards are certain to pay within twenty-four hours. Burglars may escape for years.

Baird had slept heavily. But now, as he painfully opened his eyelids, he was sure that he had not slept more than half an hour, although his wrist-watch told him that it was almost two o'clock. Only the sternest critic would have accused him of having been intoxicated last night, but—memory was a bit inactive, and his limbs ached. Intoxicated or not, he had drunk too much.

He'd missed his train home. But that could hardly be blamed to liquor. He'd decided to miss it before he'd had a single drink. Because a girl, of a sort different from any he had hitherto known, intrigued him, he had stayed over.

A girl of a different sort. Yes; she was all of that. She was the sort who willingly exchanged her youth and beauty for money. He sneered at himself. What difference did it make to him?

Suddenly he closed his eyes; memory was less sluggish. Brilliantly, despite his lids, there danced

before his eyes a pin—of platinum—from which glistened nine diamonds. Memory was racing now. How she had hesitated when she said that an aunt had given it to her! Aunt!

But what difference did it make to him who had given it to her? Except that, of course, he would be even more anxious to replace a gift from Blackmar than one from an aunt. Why, he did not know. It was just so. Hurt, angry pride made him forget, for the moment, his aches.

What an ass he'd made of himself last night! The hundred dollars that he had borrowed from Ladd, the pin that he'd lost—for the moment he waved these matters aside, while memory brooded bitterly upon his attitude toward Eileen Elsing. He supposed the girl flattered herself that she'd made a conquest. He sat up in bed and swung his feet to the floor.

A cold bath, breakfast, the raising of some money on his watch— On the floor, right at his foot, was a bill. His brows drew together as he bent over and picked it up. A hundred-dollar bill! Where on earth— Ladd had given him a hundred. But he had spent that. His own hundred-dollar bill had been slipped into the waitress's stocking at the Central. But had it? He'd been drinking. He might easily have made a mistake. And when he'd turned in last night, perhaps he hadn't been as methodically careful as he imagined. He had doubtless dropped this on the floor. His telephone-bell rang. The bill clutched in his hand, he walked to the instrument.

"Good-morning, Indian! How you feeling?" It was Jimmy Ladd, as cheerful as though his last night's festivities had had milk as their inspirational base.

"Sort of so-so," said Baird.

"You ran out on us," accused Ladd.

"It was a bit too strong for me," apologized Baird.

"For you? Not if you got into the proper training, old top. I think you've an honest-to-God talent for being a rum-hound, Rod. Of course, you're out of practise and all that, but you have a way of leaping at the old juice, and enveloping it, and making it feel at home that I envy."

"Was I as bad as that?" asked Baird.

Ladd laughed.

" 'Course not. Except for a minute or two, when I thought you'd pull Blackmar apart to see what made him tick."

"What *does* make him tick?" demanded Baird.

"He doesn't. He shrieks to heaven. It's the kale that does it for him. Do you suppose Eileen Elsing could hear him if it wasn't for that?"

"I wasn't thinking of Miss Elsing."

The laugh that came over the wire was extremely distasteful to him.

"Why try to deceive your uncle James?" demanded Ladd. "Why, if I introduced a man to Eileen and he didn't spend at least a week doing nothing else but think of her, I'd drop his acquaintance! There'd be something wrong with that man."

"Oh, she's very nice," said Baird shortly.

"'Very nice!'" mimicked Ladd. "She's a perfect corker—that's what Eileen is!"

"And is going to marry a man for his money," sneered Baird.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," argued Ladd. "Blackmar's kept out of jail so far, and he has a remarkable taste in neckties. And a man who can make eight or ten millions isn't exactly a human zero."

"I suppose not," said Baird stiffly.

"Had breakfast?" demanded Ladd abruptly.

"Just woke up."

"Then I'll come over and you can weep on my shoulder about Eileen, and I'll weep on yours."

It was rather crude of Jimmy to harp on Miss Elsing, but still Baird supposed that he *had* given cause for it.

"What are you weeping about?" he demanded.

"Me?" Ladd's laugh was not quite as care-free now. "Have I ever, Roddy me buck, intimated that my esteemed father is no unchastened hellion?"

"I think that you once said that he'd rather chase up a church aisle than Broadway," answered Baird.

"You quote me accurately," declared Ladd. "And perhaps, in some moment of girlish confidence, I have painted a portrait of myself in the character of the erring son."

"I seem to remember something like that," admitted Baird.

"Yea, bo! 'Never darken my door again!' That's father. He used to be able to repeat it backward. And then I joined the army. Forgiven? I almost drowned beneath his forgiveness.

And then I returned from France, and got my discharge, and the glamour wore off when I dallied with the grape, and—well, father delivered his famous lecture again this morning. I am no longer Little Sunshine, the Hero Heir. I am Door-Darkener, the Profligate. He happened to be slumbering lightly this morning when I crashed into the ancestral mansion, and he even neglected the office today, in order that he might parentally pry open my eyes. I've forgotten the verbiage of the ultimatum, but the gist of it is: 'On your way!' Bless his dear old heart, I'm a fearful rotter, and in three or four days, when he's begun to miss me, I'll trot home and explain to him that New Year's doesn't happen often, and isn't going to happen at all if the Prohibitionists get their way. But I've talked enough. I'll be over in twenty minutes."

Baird's mouth was hard as he hung up the telephone. Jimmy hadn't said so, hadn't even hinted it, but the intimation was there. Ladd could use the hundred that he had loaned Baird last night. Jimmy would never be crude enough to say so, but —Baird was glad that he had not tipped the waitress so generously last night. Thank heaven that he could settle the debt to Jimmy at once!

He stepped hurriedly beneath the shower. The cold spray revived him physically, and mentally, too. Of course he'd been an utter jackass, but it was all in the game of life, he supposed. Lots of men, through no particular fault of their own, suffered accidents entailing much more serious consequences than the replacing of a diamond pin.

And Eileen Elsing would receive a new diamond pin. Most certainly she would!

In Linestream, a suburb of Donchester, there was a corner lot. Before the war, Baird had been offered fifteen hundred dollars for the property, which represented the entire savings of his father. Of course, prices had dropped a bit, but there wasn't the slightest doubt that he could get a thousand dollars for it half an hour after he notified any one of a dozen real-estate firms that it was in the market. His own firm, Robbins & Robbins— But no; he'd rather not say anything about it to them. Both the Robbinses were prosy old fogies who took great personal interest in their employees.

Rubbed briskly dry, he stepped into his bedroom again. He reached under the bed for his shoes. His hand encountered a bit of paper, two bits of paper. He straightened up, staring blankly at two hundred-dollar bills!

Maybe he had drunk enough last night to make a mistake in thinking that he had given a waitress a hundred-dollar tip. But certainly he had not been in such condition as to acquire two hundred dollars without recollection of the fact. He glanced quickly at his overcoat. It was his own brand-new one; he had not walked off with the wrong one.

He sat dazedly down upon the edge of the bed. He remembered perfectly having gone through all his pockets searching for the diamond pin. He couldn't have pulled three hundred-dollar bills from his pocket without seeing or feeling them. It was credible that he'd dropped one bill, but three—

never! He got on his knees and looked beneath the bed. There was that little canvas trunk—he remembered that, remembered kicking it angrily under the bed. There were more bills on the floor by the trunk. The cover was partly open; money seemed to be oozing from it.

He reached farther under and pulled the trunk out. His wits were acute now. He knew at once that his angry kick last night had forced the lock, had permitted the money that was so tightly packed inside to expand with the cessation of pressure, to flutter upon the floor.

A knock sounded upon the door. Harshly he called a question. A maid answered him. Sudden drops were upon his forehead. He laughed nervously as he wiped them away, and called to the maid to return in an hour.

An hour? Why not ten minutes? By some amazing error, this trunkful of money had been placed in his room, and his only course was to telephone the office at once, inform the hotel staff of the affair, and— How much money was there? If they were all hundreds, like these bills that he saw— But there were thousands, too. Suddenly it seemed that the only important thing in the world was the adding of this money. His fingers trembled as he began counting.

Two hundred and three thousand and seven hundred—but he mustn't forget the hundred that he had first picked up, and which now he knew could not possibly be his own. Two hundred and three

thousand and eight hundred dollars! And it had been left in his room!

He walked to the window and stared unseeingly at Times Square. He must think, *think!* This money, this fortune—it wasn't his. He mustn't lose sight of that fact for a second.

He turned back from the window and sat down. The telephone, silent against the wall, seemed to call to him. The obvious thing, the only thing, was to telephone down-stairs and have this trunk and its contents removed.

But there was no law forbidding a man to play with his fancy. How on earth had it come into his room? Well, it hadn't walked in—that was sure. And it no longer seemed credible that a hotel porter had accidentally delivered it to this room. Trunks containing fortunes are not carelessly entrusted to porters.

Well then, why hadn't the person who left it here claimed it? For eleven hours, at least, it had been undisturbed in the room— His telephone-bell rang. The girl announced Mr. Ladd.

"Tell him that I'll be down in five minutes," said Baird.

He hung up and looked again at the trunk. He didn't have a hundred with which to pay Jimmy Ladd, and Jimmy would undoubtedly be grateful, in view of the parental displeasure incurred to-day, for repayment. But there was no necessity for weighing Jimmy's possible gratitude against—well, against theft. A person looking on, watching him,

would be justified in thinking that he intended keeping this money.

He laughed. But his mirth was not reassuring to himself. Two hundred and three thousand and eight hundred dollars! He'd never even seen so much money. Why, if it came to that, he doubted if Rockefeller had ever seen so much. Bankers might have, but the big millionaires of the country paid their bills, acquired their properties with checks. So much cash—

And *why* hadn't it been claimed? People who have mislaid two hundred thousand dollars don't oversleep, even on the day after New Year's eve.

Could it be possible that its last possessor did not intend to claim the money? Well, what difference did that make? His duty was very clearly defined. He'd telephone down-stairs immediately and— The bell rang again. He answered it. It was Ladd, speaking from down-stairs, announcing that he, for one, was starved, and purposed beginning his late breakfast.

"With you right away," said Baird.

Once again he looked at the trunk. Then he walked over to it and picked it up. In his own trunk, purchased yesterday, he placed the canvas one. There was plenty of room. It had needed a big new trunk to hold his uniforms and trophies acquired abroad. Carefully he locked it. It was certainly his duty to guard this money against the possible depredations of a maid. He was slightly dizzy as he entered the elevator.

IV

JIMMY LADD, in matters gastronomical at any rate, was a man of his word. Also, he had a persuasive way with head waiters. The *maître d'hôtel*, a captain, a waiter, and a 'bus-boy were all scurrying round the corner-seat of the Tramby grill, administering to the young man's wants, when Baird entered the room.

"How do you do it, Jimmy?" asked Baird, as the captain drew out a chair for him.

Ladd thrust his pointed spoon into the iced grapefruit; he conveyed a morsel to his mouth.

"What? Get action? Roddy, when I walk into a restaurant, the check-boy knows that it's Christmas. He flashes the word ahead that Santa has arrived." He dug again into his grapefruit. "That's one of the arguments that father uses to bolster up his frightful injustices toward me." He grinned. "Father says that if I'd earned my own money, I wouldn't be so lavish with it. And he can't see it at all when I point out to him that my main objection to work is that it will doubtless cause me to set too great a value upon money. He has the thrift idea. I try to point out its economic falsity, its glaring immorality, but he'll not listen. He told me, this morning, that I was a sucker for

every parasite in New York. Yes, sir; he said 'sucker.' If you knew father, you'd realize the extent of his wrath. And when I told him that so highly esteemed a character as the late 'Diamond Jim' Brady had said that there was a lot of fun in being a sucker if you could afford it, father told me that I could no longer afford it." His countenance took on a look of mock horror. "I trust, old top, that you can pay for this sumptuous repast?"

"If you can eat it." Baird grimaced.

A waiter removed Jimmy's fruit. Upon a hot plate he placed buckwheat cakes and sausages. Generously he applied golden sirup to the dish. Baird shook his head.

"Yours is a point of view that could only gain ground in this town, Jimmy."

"Well, New York demands the best, the most up-to-date," chuckled Ladd. "Give the old burg time, and it will spread its philosophy all over the nation. 'Cause why? Because we're the happiest folk in the country."

"You think so?"

"I know it," said Ladd emphatically. "This town is full of folks born and raised somewhere else. But show me the town that has many New Yorkers! There ain't no such place. And if there is," he went on, blissfully unconscious of contradictory utterance, "those New Yorkers are all looking forward to the day when they'll have enough money to come back to the big town. And people don't care about a place where they aren't happy."

Baird poured a second cup of coffee.

"Sorry I don't see it your way, Jimmy. But, to me, the town is simply the home of the bluffer, the would-be, the imitator, the social climber."

"You have a grouch," declared Jimmy. "Therefore you quote the envious. Let me tell you something, man: The bluffer and the imitator have a decidedly legitimate ambition. They aren't clams. They know that some one else has more on the ball than they have; so they ape him. By and by, if they imitate and bluff long enough, they'll *be* the real thing. Take a prize-fighter beginning his career. Do any sneer at him because he hopes to be champion? And because, at the outset, he avoids the best men, admitting that, at present, they are superior to him, is he a joke? Not by a long shot! He's a wise Patsy. But he studies the champion's tactics, his methods—imitates him in every way. Sensible boy!"

"No argument," said Baird. "He has a more or less legitimate ambition. But your woman, for instance, who sends her husband to the grindstone, presses his nose against it, so that he may make more money in order that she may have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Vanderbilt—— She is a fool, and her husband is a greater fool."

Jimmy nodded to the waiter. The dishes were removed. Carefully, with fingers that shook not at all, Baird noticed, he selected and lighted a cigarette.

Baird's own fingers trembled. Though he followed every word of Jimmy's talk, the canvas trunk up-stairs loomed large in the background of his

mind. Whose was it? Had its owner missed it? Was a search already being instituted?

Luxuriously, Ladd inhaled cigarette smoke.

"Calling names doesn't prove anything," he said. "We hear a lot about expensive wives. Let me tell you something, boy: Ambition is a funny thing. A man would be content with ten thousand a year, say. His wife wants fifty. She makes him hustle. He gets the fifty. His nose is at the grindstone, as you say. But it sharpens his nose. It makes him smell opportunity, and—he doesn't sag, physically or mentally. Show me an extravagant wife and, nine times out of ten, I'll show you a successful husband."

"Yes," jeered Baird; "and a man who's killing himself for nothing, so that his wife may visit on the Avenue."

"Well, the Avenue's a nice place, Rod; you must admit that," chuckled Ladd. "And why shouldn't she want to know the people who live there?"

"Because she doesn't belong with them," snapped Baird.

Ladd laughed.

"There's a fine democratic doctrine! Why doesn't she belong there if she's an attractive person socially and her husband has money enough?"

"Why isn't she content with her old friends?" Baird avoided a direct reply.

"Are you? Is anyone? What's life but movement, change? You've had five thousand a year, say. You make ten thousand a year. Do *you* run round with the same people? You bet your life

you don't—either here or in your home town of Donchester! Or in Peking, China, or Valparaiso, or Evanston, Illinois. And I'll tell you why. A motor trip is proposed. Two couples. The ten-thousand-dollar couple wants to stay at a hotel a little more expensive than the five-thousand-dollar people can afford. So they travel with another ten-thousand-dollar couple. And I'll tell you something else: The rich don't forsake their poor acquaintances so much as the poor forsake them. The five-thousand-dollar women call on the ten-thousand-dollar women. They resent her new rugs, her silver. They quit calling."

"Where did you learn all this, Jimmy?" chaffed Baird.

"Oh, I picked it up in various places," grinned Ladd. "Believe me, Rod, I know a lot about money and what it does to people."

"You never made any," said Baird sardonically.

"But I've spent a bunch," chuckled Jimmy. "You can learn as much watching the parade go as watching it come."

"Well, you're all wrong, anyway," said Baird.

"That's what you say—now. Wait till you've been in this town a while longer."

"Afraid I'll never change, then. I must get away to-day," said Baird.

"Oh, but you'll come back. Of course, now that father is on the outs with his angel child—— But he'll get over it in a week at the outside. And then I want you to meet him. There's lots of opportunity in his office, and I want you there, Roddy me buck."

Baird's heart leaped. Strangely, he, who had had nothing, had attracted the friendship of this youth who had had everything. Carefully cultivated, Jimmy Ladd's regard might lead to— He was ashamed of himself for cold-bloodedly thinking to profit by another's generosity.

"It's awfully decent of you, Jimmy, but——"

"But, gosh—I don't often meet anyone that isn't after something, that isn't always remembering who father is. And you're a nice little man, Rod; I'm for you. That's settled. I'll wire you when to come on. And I'll only introduce you to some regular folks. Of course, I'll only introduce you to girls that have already refused to marry me, like Eileen, because you're a handsome blade, Rod, and——"

"Miss Elsing refused to marry you?" asked Baird.

"Surest thing you know! But I'm in darned good company. We're going to form a club—Rejected Suitors of Eileen. I know at least seven other members. And that reminds me—just after I rang you up this afternoon, she 'phoned. Told me to remind you that you had a pin of hers. Asked me to bring you along to tea. She's going to be with Blackmar at the Amsterdam. You can wait over for a late train, eh?"

"Why—er—yes; I—must see Miss Elsing," stammered Baird. "I—you see, Jimmy, I lost that pin of hers."

Jimmy pursed his lips.

"Better bring along enough cash to buy her another, then. Eileen is strictly business. And I think Blackmar gave her the pin. He's a fussy old bird,

Blackmar. Myself, I think that maybe Eileen is making a mistake, but eight millions make loud music."

"Wouldn't you have that sometime?" hinted Baird.

"Father is quite hale and hearty, thank you," grinned Jimmy. "And Blackmar *has* his."

"And she'd marry a man for his money?" asked Baird.

Jimmy shrugged.

"Where does a lawyer take his talent? To the highest bidder, eh? And a doctor, and an author —anyone at all? Why shouldn't Eileen?"

"But—but it comes down to—selling herself," protested Baird.

"Does it? All right. Would you have her sell herself for a pretty speech or a pleasant smile or a good-looking face? It's a queer thing the way people look at marriage. A girl throws herself away on a good-looking poor young blackguard, and people call her a fool. She throws herself away on a rich young blackguard, and people say that she's made a good match."

"They say that in New York, perhaps," argued Baird.

"They say it anywhere," retorted Ladd. "But if she happens to marry a man twenty years older than herself, she has to prove, absolutely, that she loves the man before people will believe her. Why?"

"Because people suspect that money has entered into the affair."

"If they're both young, that doesn't matter," said

Ladd. "People have the wrong idea, absolutely, about marriage. It's the man's fault, too. A man forty-five offers himself to a young girl. He's grown a bit bald, a bit paunchy; his youthful good looks are gone. But to offset that, he has a record of successful achievement. But does he want the lady to marry him because of his undoubted assets? Not by a jugful! He wants to be married for something that he hasn't got. Gosh, when some girl accepts me, I hope she doesn't do it because I can dance the shimmy! I'm willing to be married because I have brains, because I've made some use of them." He colored slightly. "Of course," he went on, more constrained in manner, "I'll never mount to a damn, anyway. But just supposing—— People seem to think that love is a matter of sex attraction. It sure is; but marriage is something else again, Mawruss. Of course, I think it's better all round if the girl loves the man, but if she respects him, and he has undoubted material assets—— I'm not blaming Eileen a bit."

"I guess I look at it differently," said Baird. He had the faintest sneer in his voice.

"You don't look at it sensibly," said Ladd. "Take Eileen. You know what a little sister of the rich is? Well, Eileen is one of them. Father died ten years ago. Her uncle brought her on here. Uncle has two daughters older than Eileen. They'll never win prizes in beauty contests. Chance for jealousy, eh? You said it. Eileen always in the background—cast-off gowns, all that. And would they let her fit herself for a job? Not so's you'd

notice it. An old-maid aunt might come in handy when the cousins got married—keep house, all that sort of thing.

"But you can't keep a wise girl down. And Eileen is wise. She's got used to certain things—things that cost money. Does she want to give them up? Does anyone? Well, she's normal. First thing her uncle knew, Eileen, in her cast-off gowns and made-over suits, was a belle. The cousins could leave her out of parties, but other people wouldn't. When half a dozen men in a certain set want to marry a girl, they manage to see that she's invited around. Eileen isn't a one-punch person, Rod. She gets 'em, but she holds 'em, too. There's an Eileen that one doesn't meet at first—an Eileen who's gentle, sweet. She has more than beauty, than brains, than charm. She has all those, the Lord knows, but she sticks to a friend the way a man does. She—oh, gosh, you'll find out.

"Well, there you have it. Where her cousins tossed away a thousand, Eileen counted a penny twice. Then another uncle died. He left her four thousand a year. And Eileen ups and moves. Little apartment all her own on Fifty-ninth, opposite the park. Cousins sighed with relief; Eileen was out of the market, would render herself *déclassée*. But not Eileen. Dug up a chaperon and is invited around—— It hasn't been any too easy for her, I'll tell the world. She's been trained with a million-dollar crowd—and *likes* it. She's had to count pennies—has to count 'em still, for that matter. Four

thousand a year doesn't buy any yachts, you know. Every little jewel, every trinket——"

"I notice that she accepts them from a man to whom she's not married," said Baird.

"That pin, you mean?" Ladd shrugged. "I'm not saying that Eileen is perfect. I'm saying this: She found out early in the game that money makes this world go round. She found out that men can afford to be generous, but that women ought to run a cash business. That's why she won't hesitate a minute to let you pay for that pin. And you'll respect her more for it."

"Will I?" Baird's sneer was patent now.

"Sure you will! That's the masculine of it. If I lose your watch, you laugh it off. You won't hear to my getting another. That's because you are able to earn money to buy another one. But a woman—practically all that any of them have got they got as gifts from men. They only have a few years—most of them, poor things!—in which to collect their gifts. So they're jealous of those they have. It's plain business. You like it in a man; why not respect it in a woman, even though it's a bit different?" His face grew suddenly anxious. "Say—it won't break you, will it? That pin must be worth seven or eight hundred—— If you don't want to see her, I'll frame up some excuse, and——"

Here was Baird's chance. Jimmy Ladd was his friend. Friends forgive mistakes; they do not judge too harshly. It was a very simple thing to explain to Ladd that he was under a misapprehension, that Baird had permitted a wrong conception to arise

in Ladd's mind. Ladd knew that Baird was in moderate circumstances. Why not tell him that he was in practically no circumstances at all, that he was dependent on the job waiting for him?

But pride assailed him—false pride. He had not destroyed certain assumptions that had grown up in Jimmy's mind. Last night, he had borrowed a hundred with an air of casualness that amounted, if one were strictly ethical, to deceit. To ask Miss Elsing to wait a day for payment of the value of her pin meant that Jimmy Ladd would know that Baird had not that much in the bank. Otherwise, he would naturally write a check.

Jimmy Ladd's friendship might prove a great asset. A position in the firm of Jimmy's father might lead to undreamed-of fortune. There was no future with Robbins & Robbins. There *was* a future with Jimmy Ladd in New York.

But that future was based on friendship; friendship is easily jeopardized. Jimmy Ladd, he knew, trusted him implicitly. But if Jimmy Ladd discovered that Baird had deceived him as to his financial standing— Jimmy had expressed great tolerance for the bluffer. But men often say things that they do not mean.

But it wasn't Jimmy that he was considering at all. He might as well be honest with himself. He was thinking of Eileen Elsing. She was not at all the sort of girl that interested him. He had his own ideas about the sort of girl that he liked. How could a man care for a woman who stood for all the things to which he was opposed? Ridicu-

lous! He did not realize that he was whistling to keep his courage up, that nature works her plan without consulting us. If love were a mathematical formula, there would be no unhappy marriages. She was not at all the kind of girl that he had vaguely conceived might, some day, win his love. That was enough for him! A girl who would deliberately exchange herself for money, even though a marriage ceremony absolved her from open shame— He certainly was not going to submit himself to humiliation at her hands. And it would *be* humiliation to confess to her—though the confession went through Jimmy Ladd—that he had not cash enough in the bank to meet his obligation to her.

"Break me?" He laughed. He signed the check that the waiter had placed face downward on the table without glancing at it. He gave the man a dollar. "Not at all. And I owe you a hundred, Jimmy."

"No hurry at all, old chap!" protested Jimmy.

"Why not? I borrowed it in a hurry. Might as well pay it back the same way. And I'll have just time to drink a cup of tea with Miss Elsing before I catch my train."

"And you'll be ready to return soon?"

"Why—er——" Baird was thinking fast. "Maybe I'll return at once. I'd hardly like to go to work at my old place and leave them in a hurry. Just attend to my affairs there, and come back."

"Good boy!" exclaimed Jimmy. "This is Wednesday. By Saturday, father will be missing his

erring son. We'll have Sunday dinner together—you, too—and Monday James McPherson Ladd has a new potential partner."

"You think there's a place for me?"

"I don't think it, Rod; I *know* it."

They were in the lobby now.

"Wait for me a minute or so, Jimmy," said Baird.

Ladd nodded assent, and Baird entered the elevator. In his room he stood still for two minutes. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

It certainly was not theft that he contemplated. Supposing that he'd had a thousand dollars in the bank? Would it be morally wrong for him to take a thousand from the canvas trunk, placing his own perfectly good check therein? He didn't think it would be.

Well, his corner lot in Linestream was the same as money in the bank. He'd return to-morrow afternoon, replace the money that he was going to take now. It was almost four o'clock. No one had come to claim the trunk and its contents. If, by any possible chance, they did come, how would they prove that he had taken anything from the contents? *Prove* it? But, pshaw!—no one would claim it. When he returned, he would notify the hotel authorities of finding the trunk, first replacing the money that he had taken. He was not going to make any confession that would humiliate him in the eyes of Eileen Elsing. He would pay her for her pin.

He opened his trunk, and from the canvas box inside took a thousand dollars. This time he was

not dizzy when he walked to the elevator, but his color was high.

Twenty-four hours ago, he had looked forward to his return to Donchester, to the taking-up, where he had left off, of what had seemed to be a satisfactory career. In so far as youth ever looks ahead, he had forecast his future as one of not too arduous labor rewarded with modest pay. Some day, he had always dreamed, he might possibly achieve a minor interest in the firm of Robbins & Robbins, might go home each night to find dinner upon the table, presided over by a nice, comfortable girl—pretty, of course—who would hang breathlessly upon his speech.

Last night, he had met a different sort of girl. He had met a girl who, when she married, would leave the preparation of dinner to a competent chef and a capable butler. He had met a girl who would not look upon home as the end-all and be-all of existence, but who would treat home as man treats it—a place to go when the important things of the day had been attended to. A girl, in short, who possessed as much individuality as any man, and who would not permit that individuality to be submerged beneath marriage.

He had had, last night, his first glimpse of a life whose participants were not hampered by such petty matters as the price-list on the menu. He had met, on terms of equality, persons to whom wealth, because they had it, was a casual thing. And the very casualness with which it was treated enhanced its value in his eyes.

Donchester, while he had been in the army, had seemed some earthly paradise to which, if God were kind, he might be some day permitted to return. But now Donchester seemed the tomb of ambition, the burial-ground of hope.

V

THE tea-hour is perhaps the most charming in the better New York restaurants. Breakfast is unattractive; the loveliest feminine face is not improved by electric lights in the morning. Luncheon is an utilitarian proposition, too much like putting gasoline in the tank. Dinner and supper are apt to be feverishly gay.

But tea is a function of refinement. One senses that here New York has, for the time, forgotten haste. Conversation is quieter; restraint, unforced, is in the atmosphere. The orchestras, even when they play the latest "jazz," seem subdued. It is the hour of candle-light, when New York seeks relaxation after the labors of the day. Entering this atmosphere slowed the fevered pulse of Baird.

Blackmar and Eileen were seated in the center of the Amsterdam's tea-room when Baird and Ladd arrived. Plates had been laid for the later comers, and the girl was already munching at a toasted muffin.

"Hello, revelers!" Eileen greeted them. "You remember Mr. Blackmar, Captain Baird?"

The smile on Blackmar's lips seemed faintly contemptuous, superior, to Baird. He bowed stiffly. But stiffness left him as Eileen flashed upon him a

smile whose radiance he had not suspected. She wore a tailor-made suit—of blue serge, he guessed. A stiff flat hat of the same color sat jauntily upon her mass of auburn hair. A cream-colored collar, stiff enough to suggest masculinity, added to the boyish effect of the suit and hat.

Baird hated masculine women; he liked, he thought, soft, frilly, trailing garments for them. But the most severe tailor could not take away from Eileen Elsing the rounded lines of her figure. Her femininity was merely accented by her garb. She looked boyish, but one knew that she was all girl.

"Tea?" She looked from Baird to Ladd.

The latter grinned.

"Not a chance, Eileen. You may have better luck with Baird, but I just finished a grapefruit, three cups of coffee, five sausages, seven buckwheat cakes, some toast——"

"Spare us, Jimmy!" begged Eileen. "By the day after to-morrow, maybe, I can listen to such material matters, but on the first day of January——" She shuddered. "Didn't you make *any* good resolutions, Jimmy? I hope Captain Baird has some sense of the tribute due to the morning after."

"Oh, Baird isn't a hardened sinner like me," laughed Jimmy. "Besides, he has worry on his soul. That pin of yours——"

Baird saw the girl stiffen. Her lips wore a smile that was purely mechanical as she turned to him.

"My pin?" she questioned. "It worried you?"

"It's been worrying me for some time," inter-

posed Blackmar. "That's why I'm here to-day. I have a man down-town—sort of a wonder, he is. I always did distrust the clasp on that pin, but Eileen wouldn't have it changed. Thinks a good clasp would be too bulky. But now she's going to let this little jeweler in Maiden Lane repair it. Sorry I can't tea with you boys—though I imagine Eileen will do most of the teaing," he chuckled. "But I'll take the pin, Captain Baird, if you don't mind, and run along." He looked at his watch.

It was quite the thinnest watch that Baird had ever seen. Like the perfectly cut clothing of the man, it suggested affectation. Even the trim of his mustache— How a man could make a fortune and yet give so much thought to his appearance! He looked away from Blackmar and met the coolly questioning eyes of the girl. He felt his face burn.

"Your pin—yes—it has worried—— I—you see, Miss Elsing, I've lost it," he blurted.

The girl's expression did not change, unless hardness crept into her eyes. A matter of a few seconds—though, to Baird, it seemed minutes—she stared at him. Then she shrugged. She turned to Blackmar.

"Better run along, Sam, and keep that engagement that interferes with tea."

Upon him Baird felt, mocking his embarrassment, the cynical glance of Blackmar. He was furious with himself because he blushed.

"I—er—Miss Elsing, I—have been unpardonably careless and, of course, I want to replace——"

"Of course," she said, coolly. "As it happens,

though, I doubt if another pin like it can be found in the city."

"How did you lose it?" asked Blackmar. It was a perfectly natural question, but, somehow, in the man's tones, Baird felt sneering elation.

"If I knew that," he answered, "I would know how to find it."

Blackmar's lips pursed. He made no reply, but there radiated from him an atmosphere of incredulity.

"What does it matter?" asked Eileen. "Captain Baird is—not accustomed to New Year's celebrations, and——"

Blackmar's mustache moved. The smile was fleeting. But Baird caught it. He *had* made an ass of himself last night, and doubtless Miss Elsing had retailed his asininity to Blackmar. It would be just like the girl, he told himself. How cordially he disliked her!

"Well, it doesn't matter, Eileen. As a matter of fact, Arabin's have another pin almost like it. I'll try and drop in there to-morrow and get it for you."

Baird felt as though some one had removed him from the scene. This calm assumption of Blackmar that—

"In that case," he said evenly, "*I'll* drop into Arabin's. I think, Miss Elsing, that we have just time, if I'm to catch an evening train."

"Oh, see here, Baird," protested Blackmar; "just forget the matter. I'll get Eileen another pin. She shouldn't have worn it, anyway."

Once again the man's words were all right. Indeed, a listener might have thought Blackmar the essence of tactful kindness. But Baird, resentful of the man, read contempt in his voice. What right had Blackmar to assume that he, Rodney Baird, was not able to make good his own losses? Further, there was patronage, too much patronage, in the way he spoke to Baird. Why not "*Mr.* Baird," instead of simply "Baird"?

"You'll forgive my feeling, Mr. Blackmar, that it's a matter I can't forget?"

The two men eyed each other a moment. Blackmar's eyebrows raised. To Baird, he was the epitome of well-bred insolence. There was not a word to which he could take exception, yet never had he so desired to drive his fist against a man's face.

"Just as you say, my boy," replied Blackmar. "You'll pardon my running-away, Eileen, but—" He nodded cordially to Ladd, bowed with the least trace of formality to Baird, and left the table.

Baird looked after him, his eyes hard. He turned to the girl. Somehow he felt awkward, conscious of his newly purchased clothing. No wonder, seeing him unconventionally clad last night and wearing the same suit this afternoon, Blackmar thought him unable to replace the pin.

"I'm to catch the five-o'clock, Miss Elsing," he said. "If you wouldn't mind——"

"And you won't have any tea?" she asked.

"Thank you—no," he told her.

Jimmy Ladd signaled the waiter.

"This is my party," said the girl.

Jimmy grinned.

"When the hundred that Baird just paid me is gone—say to-morrow, Eileen—I'll let you buy me dinner."

She smiled.

"Father?"

Jimmy bowed.

"You said it. And it usually takes four days, you know."

The girl laughed, yet in her laughter was the hint of a sigh.

"Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy! And everyone thought that when you returned from France——" For the first time, Baird glimpsed gentleness in the girl. But Ladd's grin grew broader.

"I haven't time, you know. Prohibition is coming."

The gentleness left her eyes.

"You irritate me, Jimmy. You mayn't come with us."

She looked at Baird and rose. The waiter had not yet returned with Ladd's change.

"It's all right," said Ladd mock-mournfully. "Leave me to my teaful shame. Send me a wire, Rod, the minute you're coming back."

"I'll do that," promised Baird. Warmly he shook Ladd's hand.

Outside, in the taxi the Amsterdam doorman had summoned, the girl looked curiously at Baird.

"You're returning to New York, then? To live here?"

"I hope so," he told her.

He looked straight ahead, but he felt her eyes still curiously upon him. Inexplicably he thrilled. It annoyed him. Beautiful she undoubtedly was; the jaunty boyishness of her apparel, accenting her girlishness as it did, rendered her more intriguing to the eye even than she had been last night. She had brains, too. How he knew that, he could not tell, but he knew it. Certainly she had said nothing to indicate their possession. And she could be gentle, sympathetic, understanding. That much he knew from her words, her look when she had chided Jimmy for his wildness. Her later harshness could not obliterate her moment of softness.

But—she was mercenary. Jimmy Ladd could be as much of a sophist as he chose; nevertheless, nice girls—the kind that Baird had known in Donchester—were not like Eileen Elsing. They did not accept diamond pins from men, even though engaged to them; they did not, by their attitude and speech, show how absolutely they expected strangers to replace jewels which they had entrusted to the strangers for safekeeping.

It was her hard matter-of-factness about it that angered him, that disgusted him. Yet, why shouldn't she be matter of fact? Wasn't it more honest to be matter of fact? Why should she wave the matter aside, profess not to mind, when he would know perfectly well that she *did* mind? Pretty protestations were all very well, but if they were insincere, of what sense were they?

"So you're coming back to New York?" She broke in upon his musings. "I'm glad of that."

He thrilled again.

"You mean that?"

Her eyes widened. They were lovely eyes of, now, a warm gray.

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked. "And you're coming to see me."

Whether by accident or design, her hand slid from her lap and touched his. Gloved though it was, Baird sensed its firmness, its warmth. He looked at her; her eyes held mockery in them now. Her head was perched on one side—quizzically, it seemed to him. It grew above the fur collar of the overcoat that she wore like some lovely, though exotic, flower.

"May I?" he asked. His voice shook slightly.

Her nod was assent enough. He hardly dared breathe lest his hand move and remind her of its proximity to her own. They did not speak again until the taxi drew up before Arabin's.

Then they exchanged mutual smiles. Baird understood now the queer look on the taxi-man's face when he had given him the address. The girl laughed.

"Captain Baird, you have stolen my wits."

He bowed.

"The brain first, and then the heart."

Her eyes did not rebuke his banality. Her lips curved in a pretty *moue*.

"And I call myself a New Yorker, and forget that all shops are closed on New Year's. Oh, well—shall we walk?"

With fingers that shook with sudden relief, Baird

took from his pocket money for the taxi-man. Decision could wait! Explanations that a false pride forbade to be given verbally could be given in writing. He turned to the girl, his eyes blurred, to find her smiling into the eyes of an affable, portly gentleman, whose bland smile seemed to envelop her.

"Mr. Arabin, Captain Baird," the young man heard her say.

He took the gloved hand that the famous jeweler extended. Like a condemned criminal who has been notified that a pardon is on the way and who suddenly hears that the report was cruelly false, he heard Arabin say:

"You were on your way to my store? On New Year's? What sort of a celebration did you attend last night, Miss Elsing?"

She chuckled.

"If you were the kindly person you looked, Mr. Arabin, you would take us inside and let me pick my trinket."

He shrugged.

"The trays are all in the vaults."

"But you helped me select the pin that I wish to replace," she protested. "The one that Mr. Blackmar bought for me."

Arabin touched the cleft in his chin with a forefinger that, despite the glove that covered it, Baird knew to be as meticulously cared for as a woman's, and to be as soft and tenderly shaped.

"I know!" exclaimed the jeweler. "To serve you, Miss Elsing—come!"

There were an exchange of greetings with an

obsequious watchman, the rolling-back of iron shutter-doors, the unlocking of an inner door, and then the trio were inside the great main room of Arabin's.

It was not absolutely deserted, Baird noted. This place, whose vaults held millions of dollars in gold and precious stones, was guarded as the Bank of England is probably guarded. But Arabin's prideful explanations as to the electric wirings, the marksmanship and proved courage of the special detectives who lounged around rolled off Baird's ears. He only knew that an unhappy fate had contrived against him. How many people in all New York were well-enough acquainted with Arabin to achieve entrance to his shop on a holiday? It gave him, though, another light upon the possible social importance of Eileen Elsing.

Arabin was no absentee owner, no owner who allowed others to do his work. He might be somewhat too bland an individual, but he was an artist, and took an artist's pride in his achievements. He knew, Baird gathered, the exact disposition of every article in his establishment. Five minutes after they were in his private office, Eileen was looking at a pin.

"I was extremely fond of the design of the other —could it be duplicated, Mr. Arabin? Just the least change——" She pointed to the setting of one of the larger diamonds. "All the large ones? Could the settings be changed?"

Arabin smiled.

"For you, Miss Elsing, all things can be done."

She nodded carelessly. Baird noticed that, now

that she had got what she wanted, her affability toward the jeweler had slightly cooled.

"Then I'll take it," she said. "Or, rather, Captain Baird will. He lost the other. You're sure," she added, "that you can remember the setting?"

Arabin shrugged. He murmured a regret at Captain Baird's misfortune, but assured her that the change could be made. All designs were on file in the workrooms.

"A simple matter," he declared. "I doubt if it adds twenty dollars to the cost of the pin." He looked insinuatingly at Baird. "You have an account here, Captain?"

Baird shook his head.

"I thought I'd pay for it now."

"Certainly," murmured Arabin. He essayed mischievousness in his smile now. "The law forbids commercial transactions on a holiday, but—what is the law, Captain, when a lovely lady must be pleased? Thirty-five hundred and—I can't be exact as to the price of resetting. Not over thirty dollars at the outside, however. Do you wish my pen to write a check?"

Thirty-five hundred dollars! And Jimmy Ladd had thought that it would cost seven or eight hundred! *Thirty-five hundred dollars!* Yet the girl was looking at him. Arabin was waiting.

"I—er—just returned from abroad—— Don't know the condition of my account. Must return home—I——" He put his hand in his pocket and took out the roll of bills he had taken from the canvas trunk. "A deposit?" he asked desperately.

Arabin bowed ingratiatingly. He was not a gentleman. A gentleman would have laughed at the idea of a deposit when this transaction was more of a favor on the jeweler's part than a business deal. However, being a business man—as well as an artist—all the time probably accounted for Arabin's great success.

"Why, certainly, Captain," said the jeweler. "A couple of hundred, shall we say? And you wish it sent?"

Baird handed him two hundred-dollar bills. Arabin scribbled a receipt.

"I'm going to Donchester; I'll be back in New York in—a couple of days——"

"It will take at least that long for the resetting, Captain," assented Arabin. "Friday, then. Would you care to look round the building?"

Baird mumbled an excuse. He must catch a train. Eileen had apparently been paying no attention to the conversation, being too absorbed, it seemed, in looking at the pin, which she now handed to the jeweler.

"All settled? You're a dear thing, Mr. Arabin, to take us in here."

"I will be dearer than that," he told her. "I shall say nothing to our friends as to this most amazing lapse of memory of yours. To go shopping on New Year's—— You *must* have welcomed in the New Year."

Outside, the succession of bolted doors and iron shutter-doors having been passed again, the girl spoke to Baird.

"Friday, did he say? Then—suppose you bring it to my apartment and dine with me? Eh?"

He stammered an assent. He hailed a taxi. At its door, she looked at him regretfully.

"Sorry I can't ask you to come along, but I must pay a duty call in Gramercy Park—and you've to go to your hotel, I suppose?"

He nodded. She flashed him a smile and was gone.

Thirty-five hundred dollars! He turned back to Arabin's. He'd cancel the order! He'd get his two hundred back and leave New York and never return! How on earth could he ever possibly pay for it? How dared this girl—she was a snob, too, he'd just discovered, in addition to those other traits of character to which he objected—how dared she entrust him with a bauble worth that amount of money? It was her own carelessness, in the first place, wearing it insecurely clasped. And she'd said that it was a gift from an aunt last night, and to-day brazenly admitted that Blackmar had given it to her. For a girl like that—to worry— Jimmy Ladd had assured him positively that there would be a place for him in his father's firm. The salary would be—well, large. He might be able to buy the pin from his salary—delay, some weeks, its presentation. If he didn't buy the pin now, his opportunity with Ladd was gone.

And, anyway, he must go to Donchester and raise the thousand that he had borrowed—he shivered slightly at the word—from the canvas trunk. Thousand? He'd only spent three hundred of it so far.

On the first step of the short flight that led to

Arabin's, while the watchman looked at him with ready recognition, he stopped. No need of speaking to the jeweler now. His deposit covered ten times over the expense of the alteration in the setting. He could wait until day after to-morrow, anyway. There was no hurry.

VI

DON'T worry," "Worry killed a cat." "Attune yourself to the infinite and——"

The doctors began it, or thought that they did. As a matter of fact, when religion first emerged from the fearsome fog of superstition, it told man to hold to faith in the goodness of God—in other words, not to worry.

War itself, with its tendencies toward fatalism, teaches one not to worry. But Baird, fresh from warfare, crumpled a newspaper and threw it on the floor of the train. He had read an article which told that all ills are of the mind. "If," said the author, "we attune ourselves to the infinite——"

Security had come to Baird upon his return to the Tramby. The clerk who handed him his key was smilingly courteous; the elevator-boy was almost obsequious. In his absence, the maid had attended to his room. The big trunk was undisturbed. Surely there was nothing of suspicion in the hotel that related to Baird.

His first impulse, upon learning the cost of the trinket for Eileen Elsing, had been to cancel his order. His second was to postpone cancellation. His third was the same as his first.

But—as yet there was no hue and cry. The

missing canvas trunk had evidently not been traced to his room, and if he left the Tramby to-day and returned to-morrow, and in his absence the money were found in his own big trunk, it would be easy to maintain utter ignorance of the matter. And if his trunk were undisturbed, he could replace the money that he had taken from it and inform the hotel authorities. It was unnecessary to pay his bill before leaving. Inasmuch as he was leaving practically all his baggage behind him, he could settle upon his return. It followed, therefore, that he did not need to take with him the seven hundred dollars that still remained to him of the thousand that he had abstracted from the trunk. Enough for his fare to Donchester— He might as well take fifty dollars with him. He returned the balance to the canvas trunk, and locked outside it his own bigger box.

He took with him a small hand-bag containing a change of linen, informed the clerk at the hotel desk that he would be gone overnight, and raced to the Grand Central in a taxi-cab.

The five-o'clock train was a popular one. The parlor-car chairs were all taken, and Baird was compelled to ride in a day coach.

But, somehow, with every minute that passed, his distaste for his surroundings became more acute. The people in this day coach— Perfectly decent people, no doubt about that. But there wasn't one of them who wouldn't have ridden in a parlor-car if the cost had not been too great.

Money! It was the most important thing in the

world. Of course, a person could be happy without money, but it was very hard to be comfortable without it.

Back in the Hotel Tramby was a trunk that contained more than two hundred thousand dollars. With that much money— It was then that his eye spied the don't-worry article.

His lips twisted in a sneer as he threw the paper down. Philosophy for fools! How could a man help worrying when he had incurred obligations that were beyond his ability to meet?

But it was a long ride to Donchester. Baird had ample time in which to review the past twenty-four hours. It was quite true that he had lost Eileen Elsing's pin. But one cannot work in a real-estate office without acquiring a smattering of law. He remembered that one of the clerks had been attending night law-school a few years before. Facing an examination in a subject termed "Bailments," he had asked Baird to read him certain questions and check up on his answers.

And what, as Baird remembered it, had been the responsibility of a person who, for accommodation, not for cash, acted as custodian of the property of another? To use ordinary care—no more.

Well, he had certainly used ordinary care. He had put Miss Elsing's pin in his pocket. He would have done no more with a jewel of his own. Certainly there was no legal obligation on his part to replace the pin. As for the moral obligation—that was different. Of course, he should repay. *But if he couldn't?* Well, all he had to do was tell her so.

Before his eyes floated the face of the girl. He could see those perfect eyebrows lifted, could see the faint curl of the red lips, could almost feel the contempt in the hot gray eyes. And she would tell Blackmar. He could hear their conversation.

"Baird get your pin, Eileen?" Blackmar would ask.

The girl would shrug her smooth, satiny shoulders.

"I understand that he's just a bookkeeper on a spree. I suppose that his salary would pay for it in a year or two," she'd say.

"Nasty little rotter!" Blackmar would sneer. "Oh, well, when a beggar's on horseback, he likes to pretend that he's a cavalier. I'll have it sent up tomorrow."

And they would dismiss him from their thoughts, save when they met Jimmy Ladd, at whom they would good-humoredly jibe for introducing a welsher into their lives.

A welsher! And Jimmy Ladd would think of his old comrade in arms as a man too poor in spirit to confess that he was poor in worldly goods.

Baird, in his room at the Portland, in Donchester —a room whose dinginess offended his eye after the luxury of the Tramby—awakened next morning with his mind made up. He must pay the price, the price of humiliation. Furthermore, he wouldn't sell his property. He'd taken three hundred and fifty dollars from the canvas trunk. To pay his bill at the Tramby—well, a loan of four hundred dollars would be more than enough, counting what he still had

with him. He'd give a mortgage for that much. If he sold the land, he'd be under the temptation of spending it, and it was his only security against mishap.

Of course, it might be argued that he ought to realize all that he could and give Eileen Elsing the proceeds on account, but—if he waited until conditions in the real-estate market were better, he would realize just so much more. It would go to her, he told himself sternly. She'd *have* to wait.

He breakfasted hurriedly. He was at the office of Raymond & Gerritt at two minutes past nine. He got right down to business with the real-estate men. He waved aside congratulations upon his safe return from France.

"You know my lot in Linestream?" Gerritt, the junior partner, nodded assent. "I want to borrow four hundred on it," said Baird. Gerritt pursed his lips.

"All right. But why don't you sell? We have a client who'll pay twelve hundred——"

"You offered me fifteen hundred two years ago," said Baird.

"The real-estate market is stagnant," remarked Gerritt. "However, our client might go to thirteen hundred."

Baird shook his head.

"Don't want to sell. I want four hundred for—oh, make it a couple of years. And I want the money to-day—this morning."

Gerritt nodded.

"Have it for you at noon. But prices are sag-

ging, Baird. Better take thirteen hundred and get out from under."

"Thanks, no," said Baird. "I'll be back at noon, then."

Outside, he whistled softly. Realty conditions weren't as bad as he'd pessimistically imagined. An offhand offer of thirteen hundred meant that, if he had time to bargain, he might get as much as he'd been offered two years ago. Oh, well—all the more proof that, if he hung on a few months, he'd get, perhaps, two thousand. Better for Miss Elsing to wait a few months and for him to get more.

He turned toward the office of Robbins & Robbins. The stenographer was the first to spy him. She gave a little shriek. The other clerks saw him; he was in the midst of a congratulatory little throng that did much to restore the self-esteem that he had lost in the last two days.

"The bosses in?" His voice unconsciously lowered, and he flushed resentfully. He, lately an officer in the United States army, whispered when he mentioned the men who had employed him.

Andrews, one of the salesmen, winked warningly.

"Better handle 'em careful, old top. You know—the old New England conscience stuff."

Baird stared.

"I don't get you," he said.

Andrews shrugged.

"Your little party at the Central night before last."

"What about it?" demanded Baird. He colored again.

Andrews winked; there was extreme sophistication, so Andrews thought, in the wink.

"New Year's comes but once a year, of course," he said. "But this slipping the kale into a lady's stocking—— You know," went on Andrews, "it isn't done in Donchester."

"Who saw me?" demanded Baird.

"Herbert," replied the salesman. "He was over on some business or other. Got back yesterday afternoon. Told us all about it—some swell friends you must have, all right," he said enviously. "Well, Herbert didn't stop in the outer office. He told the bosses. Mamie"—he referred to the stenographer—"was in there. And the old boys were sure shocked."

Baird squared his shoulders. "Herbert" was the nephew of the two brothers Robbins. He was not employed by the firm, but, an attorney, he did considerable work for them. It was just like the sneaking little slacker—Herbert had claimed a dependent in the draft who, Baird had known, was *not* as dependent as young Robbins pretended—to tell his uncles. He walked brusquely into the inner office.

The two brothers Robbins sat at twin desks. Clean-shaven, with upper lips somewhat too long and thin for generosity, they looked almost like twins.

"I've come back to work," said Baird tersely. He didn't care a hoot whether they liked his manner or not. Listening to gossip about a man who'd just returned from abroad——

Both brothers rose. They shook hands con-

strainedly. Each seemed to wait for the other to speak.

"You telegraphed me," Baird said.

The younger cleared his throat.

"Why, yes, of course, Baird, of course. But I—ah——"

The elder brother took up the burden.

"We—ah—we'd hoped, Baird, that participation in the great crusade would have—ah—er—purified you, as it were, by fire, and—ah——"

He stopped, helplessly. Baird eyed him coldly. Within him was rising a resentment that fought for outlet.

"But even if I'm not purified," he said, "my job is waiting for me?"

"Certainly, certainly," said the elder brother. "Most assuredly, but—er—we were most surprised —*most* surprised at hearing of your conduct night before last in New York."

"Yes? Just what did I do that surprised you?" asked Baird.

The brothers looked at each other.

"You were drinking—drinking most heavily, Mr. Baird. And you know that we permit *none* of our employees to drink. We shall most certainly insist upon an assurance, Mr. Baird, that, while you are in our employ, you refrain utterly from touching liquor."

"I see. Any other little things you want me to promise?"

The elder brother frowned.

"Your attitude is not conciliatory, Mr. Baird,"

he said reprovingly. "And there is something else. Putting money in a waitress's stocking is not—ah—the sort of thing that we can countenance."

"I see," said Baird. Impulsive, hot-tempered, their seeming injustice fired him to instant wrath.

"Don't want me to take a class in Sunday-school, do you?" he queried.

"Now, now, Mr. Baird; this is not at all the sort of way to talk," remonstrated the younger brother.

"How about the way you're talking to me?" demanded Baird. "Is it any of your business what I do outside this office?"

"It certainly is!" snapped the elder brother. "No employee of ours can be outrageously and publicly immoral."

"There were some fairly respectable citizens in the Central Tuesday night," said Baird.

The brothers sniffed.

"Donchester, thank God, has different standards of respectability from New York," said the younger.

"Your nephew was there," said Baird.

The brothers stiffened.

"As a sightseer," said the elder. "Not as a participant in a godless orgy."

"That's what he tells you."

The brothers exchanged glances.

"Your manner," said the younger, "is not—er—repentant, Mr. Baird."

The flame of anger burned brightly now.

"If I were, I'd tell God about it—not you two!" he cried. "Does a job here mean that I must apolo-

gize for everything you don't happen to approve of? Because, if it does, I don't want your job."

The partners stared at him. The man who had left them eighteen months ago had been a meek person.

"While you are in this frame of mind," said the elder, "it would perhaps be as well if you did not come back, Mr. Baird."

"You said it just ahead of me," said Baird.

He walked, almost blindly, from the office. He responded curtly to the questions of the clerks in the outer office. "I'm through," he told them. "Those godly gentlemen are too much for me. They'd foreclose a mortgage with a grin, but because a man attends a New Year's party——" He stalked from the building.

From a cigar store he called up Raymond & Gerritt.

"I'll take that thirteen hundred if I can get the cash by noon," he told the junior partner.

"You'll have it by noon," Gerritt promised.

VII

THE night clerk at the Tramby greeted Baird by name. His smile, as he handed over the room key, was cordial.

"No mail, Captain," he said.

His nonchalant manner restored momentarily Baird's confidence, which had lessened as the distance to the Tramby had lessened. If anything was wrong, surely the clerk's manner would have indicated it.

In his room, with the door carefully locked behind him, he examined his trunk. Its contents were still undisturbed. He sat down on the edge of the bed and wiped his forehead with a trembling hand.

It had been a full day! Definitely he had cut all ties that had bound him to his former life. Donchester lay behind, not merely the five-hour train-journey but a cycle of existence in the rear.

Forty-eight hours' ago, Baird had been an easy-going sort of chap, adaptable, content, averagely ambitious. But to-night—

Excitement had carried him along through the forenoon and half the afternoon in Donchester. But once aboard the train, with the proceeds of the sale of his Linestream property in his pocket, reac-

tion had set in. Up to now, he had assumed that, if, in his absence, a search of his trunk should reveal the money therein, he could deny all knowledge of the matter.

But, as the train sped along toward New York, doubt began to arise. For instance, he would have to convince the hotel people—the police, too—that it was quite reasonable to assume that whoever had left the money had possessed a key to Baird's trunk. Of course, it was not an impossibility that a stranger should own such a key, but it was rather an incredibility. He had no clear idea of what his actions would be if suspicion met him at the hotel.

Now, with the contents of the canvas trunk intact, he could realize how dangerous had been his position while he had been away. For if it had been discovered, and its rightful owner had known the exact amount that should have been in it— Come to think of it, the canvas trunk was packed most oddly. The money had been thrust in higgledy-piggledy. And you simply couldn't get around the dazing fact that there had been no hue and cry raised about its loss.

There had been no inquiry made about this money! That was the great outstanding fact, potential of illicit profit, pregnant with possibility.

He rose to his feet, with a shrug of his shoulders, as though tossing away a physical burden. He walked to the telephone. The sort of thoughts that were seething in his brain were not the proper guests for his mind to entertain. He'd been long enough in

his room for him to have discovered the money. If he telephoned now, he would be acquitted of any possible charge that anyone could bring against him. Whereas, if he delayed, question might be raised against his honesty.

His honesty! The legacy of generations of decent, law-abiding men and respectable, modest women! Why, he wasn't even *dreaming* of tossing that legacy aside! It had been all right enough to *borrow*, for twenty-four or thirty-six hours, money that he could replace without difficulty, but—

The telephone-bell rang as he lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Captain Baird?"

He left a delightful shiver run up his back. The last voice that he had expected to hear, yet the most welcome.

"Miss Elsing!"

Her laugh was merry.

"Do you mean it, Captain Baird?"

"Mean what?" he stammered.

She laughed again.

"I'm a vain thing, Captain Baird. Do you know, I'm so conceited that I thought that your voice sounded, well—pleased."

"My voice is the truest barometer of my heart," he assured her.

"You've improved," she told him. "Does home always do that for you?"

"New York is my home now," he answered.

"Its effect is almost instant, isn't it?"

"Perhaps it isn't New York that's the cause; it might be you," he said.

"Do you know," she laughed, "that there isn't a great deal of sense to what you say?"

"Do you demand sanity from your worshipers?"

"Aren't we breathless, though?"

"Why delay?" he demanded.

"Why, indeed!"

It was the merest hint at flirtation, but—Baird thrilled.

"I suppose," she said, "that you're wondering why I am so unmaidenly, not to say brazen, as to telephone you?"

"Do we question the gifts of the gods?" he retorted.

The faintest, most delightful whistle came along the wire.

"Captain Baird, you amaze me! I feared you were a stick."

"And now the stick puts forth leaves."

"Pretty flowers," she countered.

"I am bowing," he told her.

"I courtesy to you, Captain Baird. But—I didn't phone for all this, delightful though it is. You didn't know my address. And you are to dine with me to-morrow evening. The Creighton Arms, on West Fifty-ninth Street, at seven."

"I suppose," he said, "that Jimmy would have told me."

"Intimating, forward youth, that I thought up an excuse?"

"Did you?" he asked.

"For your vanity, you shall be punished, sir. I shall invite Jimmy to dinner——"

"No!" he begged.

"And Sam Blackmar." She was very severe.

"No! No!" he cried. "The Constitution says that we are not to suffer cruel and unusual punishments, Miss Elsing."

"Well—you *should* be punished, you know. I might—heap coals of fire on your head. I might admit that my telephoning *was*—an excuse to talk. But I won't. Good-night, sir."

He heard the click of the instrument. Dazedly he hung up. Of course, a girl like her—engaged to a multimillionaire—wouldn't look at a chap like himself, but— The bell rang again. It was Jimmy Ladd.

"Took a chance, old topper, that you'd be back. So excited, anyway, that if you hadn't been in, I'd have talked to the hotel operator. Must talk to somebody when you have something to say, eh?"

Baird laughed.

"What's on your soul, Jimmy?"

"On my soul, Jimmy? How familiar you are! Do you know that you're talking to a man of power, place, and influence? I suppose, in your benighted ignorance, that you think that you're talking to the wastrel son of James McPherson Ladd, senior."

"What on earth have you been drinking, Jimmy?"

"Who? Me? My boy"—the voice was suddenly solemn—"you couldn't push a drink down past my

prohibitory tonsils if you used a battering-ram. Roddy me lad, you are now listening to the junior partner of the firm of James McPherson Ladd & Company."

Baird trembled.

"On the level, Jimmy?"

"Yea, verily, comrade in arms! Father didn't wait four days. Sent for me to-night. Old boy feeling sort of down. Only heir comes to him. Handshake. 'Son,' says ancient sire, 'I have pursued wrong tactics. Made a fool of you. Now will pursue correct dope. Make you a partner, give you equal responsibilities, and you will cut the red-eye. Eh, what?' "

There were sounds of a laughing struggle at the other end of the telephone. Then a voice deeper than that of Jimmy spoke to Baird.

"This is the senile sire to whom my irreverent son refers, Captain Baird. He is a graceless vagabond, eh? I think that he has no redeeming virtues. Which is why I love him. I've been fighting him all my life, and I'm tired. He wins. I shall probably live long enough to see my name printed in bankruptcy, but——"

Another struggle sounded over the wire. Then Jimmy spoke again.

"Age has robbed him of his optimism, Roddy. Well, well, you and I together will show him a little business jazz."

Quite evenly, Baird spoke.

"You really think there's a place for me in your office?"

"Think so? I don't know what Eileen Elsing would say if I didn't fix it for you to remain in New York."

"I don't think I understand, Jimmy."

Anxiously, Jimmy spoke.

"Well, for gosh sake, don't *mis*understand, Roddy old top. That was a joke in bad taste: Eileen has nothing to do with it. *I* want you; you're the laddie buck I need. But"—and he chuckled—"I don't think Eileen will mind a bit. And it will do Blackmar a lot of good. Success is making his liver torpid."

Into his tone, Baird tried to put an incredulous jeer.

"As if she'd look at me! When she's going to marry Blackmar!"

Jimmy Ladd laughed.

"Marriage isn't going to put any blinders over Eileen's eyes, boy. It'll take 'em off. Dining with her to-morrow night, eh? How about Saturday with us?"

"It's a go," said Baird.

"Fine stuff! And, meantime, be a good boy and say your prayers with an extra one for all the nice kindly barkeepers. There's a long, hard winter ahead of them. I'm on the wagon now. By-by."

Baird stood a moment by the telephone. All that he had to do was call the office now, tell them of the money in the canvas trunk, and—kick Opportunity down the front stoop.

He walked over to his trunk. Deliberately he took out of the canvas trunk inside three thousand dollars. He wouldn't postpone until to-morrow what

he knew was to be done. He'd take the money *now!* Decision made, his mind was suddenly at peace. He was asleep three minutes after the lights were turned out.

VIII

THERE is no more famous jewelry shop in the world than that of Arabin's. Its exterior resembles a great bank, its interior the dream of Aladdin.

One passes through a revolving door, embarrassedly conscious of the scrutiny of a uniformed doorman. One hesitates—unless one is a millionaire—a bit uncertainly beyond the entrance. Well-bred salesmen eye one aloofly. Sauntering along the aisles are other well-dressed, well-born-seeming gentlemen. They seem to bear no relationship to the heavy-hoofed detectives seen in hotels and banks. Yet the initiate know that the tails of frock coats may hide automatic pistols, that a most husky chest may rise and fall beneath a correct cravat.

Seldom, save during the Christmas shopping-season, is there any crowd in Arabin's. The stranger wonders how the great concern succeeds. And then, perhaps, he overhears a fragment of the conversation between a customer and a languid, though courteous clerk. One notes that the trifle under examination by the customer is priced at ninety-five thousand dollars or so. One understands.

At his late breakfast at the Tramby, this Friday morning, Baird had been attracted by one of Web-

ster's cartoons in an afternoon paper. It was headed: "The Thrill That Comes Once in a Lifetime." A small boy was looking at a circus parade. Baird had recognized the cartoonist's gift for catching the quick joys of boyhood. Now, as he hesitated momentarily, he remembered the picture and smiled at his own thrill. Arabin's was to him what the circus was to the small boy.

Arabin was not in his office, but his smiling secretary took Baird in.

"Miss Elsing's pin? I think it's ready, Captain Baird."

He pressed a button; a dapper youth responded. In three minutes the secretary was opening a dainty box. Against its purple-satin lining the pin gleamed and glittered. In fancy, Baird saw it against the chiffon covering of Eileen's bosom. There was nothing of hesitation in the movements of his fingers whereby thirty-three hundred and twenty-two dollars were transferred from his pocket to the clerk.

No one would pick his pocket this time; no carelessness would lose this pin. Inside his waistcoat he buried the little box. Against it his heart beat furiously. His color was high as he left the shopping-place of wealth.

He was as indecisive as most persons. He was normal, had the normal brain. And the normal brain is as variable as an April day. But he had the element that makes for success in life. Having wandered uncertainly all round a problem, he could finally, having reluctantly made up his mind, follow

through on the course chosen with no lingering unwillingness.

He had made his decision last night. There were, as yet, no qualms of regret. He had decided that it was necessary to his career, to his success, that Eileen's pin be given to her. It was a condition, not a theory, that confronted him. He had met the condition. Let theories go hang!

Idly, his lifting chest feeling the pressure of the little box in his waistcoat's inner pocket, Baird started up the avenue. Limousines, taxis, occasional hansoms, lured from their stables by the soft air, passed him, crowded with people whose furs cried of prosperity. Even those who rode the more democratic 'buses were garbed expensively. It was the "spendingest" year that New York, accustomed though she was to spending, had ever known. But Baird, though unaware that even New York asked itself dazed, the question, "Where do they get the money?" felt himself wondering what was the apparently inexhaustible source of the revenues that the country paid to Manhattan.

He passed Forty-second Street, still drinking in the wonder of the street. Power, glamour—and glory! Money meant that. It might be an unworthy sort of glory, but surely there was something legitimate in the exultant pleasure that a man took in his money. A thing inherently wrong could not exist for thousands of years. Therefore, wealth was legitimate. Its acquisition— But who cared about that? To *have* it—that was what counted.

He reached Fifty-ninth Street and remembered

that Eileen lived on this street. He was to dine with her to-night, and—he ought to have apparel suitable to the occasion.

In his pockets were over a thousand dollars. Of course, ready-made evening clothes were all right, but— He had passed a most expensive-looking shop a few streets south. He retraced his steps and entered it. An inconspicuous sign in the window said, "Tailored clothing without the annoyance of a try-on." They might possibly fit him.

They could, quite correctly. He ordered a dinner jacket and a formal evening suit sent by special messenger to the Tramby.

Farther down the avenue he found a haberdashery. The clerk shrugged superciliously at being asked to show ready-to-wear shirts, but—there were some excellent soft and stiff shirts at seven dollars. They would do, of course, for an emergency—indeed, they were carried only as samples, really, of what the firm could do; they would fit, yes, but— Baird left with four shirts, an assortment of collars and ties, some really excellent links and studs that cost the mere trifle of one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and had been measured for a dozen outing shirts and half a dozen dress shirts. At another shop, he bought shoes suitable for evening wear. Then, in a taxi, he raced to the Tramby. He had no fears, this time, upon entering the lobby. If discovery had been made, he would brazen it out.

But discovery had not been made. The clerk's friendly smile as he received his key was proof enough of that. Up-stairs, in his room, he counted

his money ruefully. He had spent, in adornment for himself, in the neighborhood of six hundred dollars.

Then he laughed. It was a good investment. A man who was to hold a prominent position in the firm of James McPherson Ladd & Company could well afford good clothing.

Dressed finally, he surveyed himself in the long mirror that backed the bathroom door. Not so bad. He removed the dress coat and the white waistcoat. It was to be an informal little dinner—just himself and the girl. A dinner jacket would do— He'd wear it.

At the door, he paused and looked at the trunk. It was locked all right. To-morrow, he'd look up rooms. Meantime, he'd not worry. His mouth was hard, cynical, as he locked the door and started for Eileen's apartment.

But it was soft when the tiny lift in the building where she lived deposited him opposite her door. And it was wreathed pleasurably when the door opened and the girl herself stood before him.

She dropped him a mock courtesy as he, with a daring that he had not known himself to possess, kissed her hand.

"My poverty does not annoy you, then?"

"'Poverty'?" He looked down the short hall, observing the prettily furnished drawing-room.

"I have but one maid," she pouted, "and she is in the kitchen. I answer the bell myself to-night."

He hung up his overcoat and followed her down the hall.

"I see you that much the sooner," he told her.

She smiled at him.

"Do you know, Captain Baird, I like your pretty speeches."

They were in the drawing-room now. Beyond it he could see a tiny dining-room, its table daintily set.

But the rooms, delightful though they were, were but a setting for her. He had seen her, sophisticated-seeming, in evening dress. He had seen her, still with her air of extreme worldly wisdom, in a snug tailored suit whose boyishness could not take away her look of knowledge. But to-night she was a simple girl.

Her hair was low upon her head, a huge mass of it in the rear, hiding the nape of a neck that he knew was white as snow. Her dress was white, not nearly so low as that dress she had worn at the Chummy Club and the Central, yet permitting a hint of a gentle bosom. About her neck was a string of pearls.

She pirouetted before him.

"You like my frock?"

"I adore it—and you," he told her.

Her mouth pursed, but her eyes were merry. He noted, for the first time, the extreme length of her lashes.

"I see," she said, "that I shall have extreme difficulty in keeping you in hand, Captain Baird."

"You have merely to close your fingers; I am in your hand now," he said.

She whirled about again. He had danced with

her, yet he had not realized how lissomely graceful she was. Nor how alluringly girlish.

She was like a diamond, that in one light gleams brilliantly cold, and that in another shines hotly, and that in another is soft and translucent as a drop of water.

To-night, she was soft. She radiated not merely innocence but ignorance of the harsher, the meaner things of life. And this was the girl that he had condemned, termed mercenary, merely because, a girl, she permitted the inevitable facts of life to mold her career. He didn't blame her. She was no *Hausfrau*. The finer things of life—they belonged to her by right.

From his pocket he drew the little Arabin box. Her eyes flashed with pleasure as he handed it to her. She opened it, and from its satin nest took the pin.

"You may pin it on," she told him.

Clumsily, holding his breath, he forced his shaky hands to put the clasp through the shimmery white stuff of which her gown was made. He exhaled deeply when the gracious task was performed.

"Shut your eyes," she commanded.

He did so. He felt two light hands upon his shoulders. He knew that she was on tiptoe. For the merest fraction of a second, her lips touched his. It was the sort of kiss that a primary-school girl might give her brother, yet it burned its way into Baird's very heart.

He reached for her. With a laugh, she eluded him.

"You have been paid," she warned. "There must be no usury."

His mouth quivered. Then he forced his lips into a smile.

"Not even a legal rate of interest?"

She pretended a frown.

"Do you dare to intimate that you have not been paid ten times over?"

"I could not be guilty of such a thing," he said.

Her mock frown vanished. She smiled.

"Captain Baird, you're *nice!* I like you."

Before he could reply, a trim mulatto maid announced dinner.

IX

"YOU don't care for them? But perhaps you wanted a cocktail first?"

He shook his head.

"Not to-night, thank you."

"I'm glad," she whispered.

He glowed. It was as though, somehow, she had taken a deep interest in his well-being, had decided that alcohol militated against that well-being, and as though he had cheerfully made a great sacrifice to prove his great devotion. She had that gift of making the trifle seem of importance, because it was invested with her personality.

"No," he grinned; "it isn't that I don't care for them." He eyed the *hors-d'œuvres* upon his plate. "It's simply that it's all so—wonderful."

She laughed.

"*Hors-d'œuvres* wonderful? There is a delicatessen store on Sixth Avenue where I buy them, and the wonderful thing about them is the price they charge. That's all."

"I didn't mean that at all," he responded. "And you know it."

She pursed her lips. Her eyes held dancing gleams. She lifted her shoulders and dropped them with a heavy sigh.

"Of course I know it, Captain." Her voice was dramatic. "I know that you are thrilled, exalted, by my nearness. I know that in your heart a song is singing, and——"

Her mockery was open now. Beneath it he colored resentfully. She was quick to read his thoughts. Her voice changed. It was no longer mock serious, but truly so. There was a little of disappointed petulance in it, too.

"From France you should have brought back *one* thing, anyway," she told him. "Finesse. Captain Baird, I'd love to flirt with you, only—I'm afraid that I couldn't be sure that you were really flirting."

He bowed across the little table.

"One might begin by flirting, but the game would soon become serious, Miss Elsing."

She approved him with her eyes.

"That's better."

She ate her little square of toast, caviar-covered.

He had never tasted caviar before. He did not like it. The asparagus tips, in their creamy sauce, pleased him better.

"Tell me something about yourself," she said.

"There is so little, Miss Elsing." He shrugged. "For twenty-six years I emulated the clam. Then I met you. That was three—is it *days* ago?"

"Does it seem so long?" she asked.

"And so short, too. I don't understand it." He looked puzzled. Ingenuous frankness was in his eyes. "Do you believe in love at first sight, Miss Elsing?"

She nodded thoughtfully.

"There is," she said slowly, "a certain—shall we call it crudity? No; that isn't the word. Bluntness. That's it. A certain bluntness that is not without charm. Perhaps I was wrong in wishing finesse from you. The other is attractive. Tell me some more, Captain."

He grinned.

"The easiest thing in the world, Miss Elsing. Has it ever seemed to you that two souls, like electric sparks, leaping across a void——"

She nodded with emphasis.

"Indeed, yes—many times!"

"'Many times,' eh? '*Many times!*' I don't think that I shall enjoy your party, Miss Elsing."

"We *are* rather stupid, both of us," she stated. "Suppose that you go more deeply into the history of those twenty-six clam-like years? Before the army—what?"

He shrugged again.

"Nothing much. Business." His air was the perfection of slightly bored casualness.

The maid entered in response to the girl's ring. She served a clear soup. Her ministrations were a sort of screen, Baird felt, from behind which the girl studied him. Yet her voice, while not bored, was as casual as his own as she asked, when the maid had gone:

"Business? What sort, Captain?"

"Real estate."

"In Donchester?"

"W-e-l-l, I was connected with a Donchester firm,

but my—own interests were in the suburbs. Linestream property, mostly."

"Oh, I know Linestream. The Cathers. Did you know them?"

"Eleanor? And her brother?"

"Surely! Bob Cather."

"Went to school with him," he told her.

"Rock's?" She seemed quite intimately acquainted with the Cathers.

"No," he told her. "Bob left the high school in the second year. I stayed on. Father didn't believe in private schools."

She nodded understandingly.

"So many people don't. Of course, in New York it's different. The public schools here are quite—impossible. But Linestream. Yes, of course; Eleanor went to the high school for a year, too." She drank her soup. Most emphatically she did not lick her lips with her tongue. Yet she suggested a kitten, a very dainty kitten doing that very thing. "See much of Bob of late years?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Not for a long time."

"Of course not! He came rather a cropper." She rang again for the maid. "So you know the Cathers," she said musingly.

"Oh, they've probably forgotten all about me," he told her.

He knew her intention as plainly as though she had told him. She would write Eleanor Cather and make inquiries about Captain Rodney Baird. Well, he *had* known the Cathers at high school—had

known them as one student must necessarily know his classmates. But that was all. Socially, they moved in a world which he had never, until within the past few days, even glimpsed.

But—Eleanor Cather would know nothing about him. Her reply to Eileen must state that fact. Therefore, Eleanor Cather would be unable to shatter the fiction of wealth which he had, without an absolute falsehood, just now builded. That he was socially unknown would not matter to Eileen. His acquaintance with Jimmy Ladd was sufficient Manhattan voucher.

"You've definitely quit real estate?" asked Eileen.

"Forever I hope," he laughed. "Had a deal pending when I went into the army. Went back and closed out yesterday. Going in with Jimmy."

"As one of the firm?" She was frankly curious. Baird felt a curious elation at her interest. He laughed deprecatingly.

"I hardly expect anything like that just now. I haven't the Ladd kind of money, Miss Elsing."

She pursed her lips.

"I'm inclined to believe that you will have—some day."

"Thank you. I think so myself. I want it. Does that seem barbarous?"

"To want money?" She glanced about her tiny dining-room. "All the world is barbarous, then. I have never met anyone, Captain Baird, who did not place money above everything else."

"So? Then you haven't been meeting the right

sort of people, Miss Elsing. Money isn't so important as that."

"You say so," she retorted. There was the suspicion of a jeer in her voice. "Lots of people say so, but—I wonder if they could stand a test."

"Oh, I think that you could," he said.

Her shoulders lifted a trifle.

"You must say that, of course, if you are to keep up the pretense of electric sparks leaping across a void."

"I'm not sure that it is a pretense, so far as I am concerned."

She laughed.

"Nice man!" She steered the subject away from herself deftly. "So you are to be with Jimmy. Did you know that his father has taken him into partnership?"

"Great news!" he said heartily.

"Rather!" she exclaimed. "And his father has sense. Jimmy is not the sort of boy to be treated as a child. With responsibility, he will develop; he will be—Jimmy will be a great financier."

Something of calculation was in her eyes now. Baird remembered his breakfast with Jimmy, two days ago, when the young man had openly admitted having been rejected by Eileen. Jimmy was a potential millionaire when he had proposed to the girl; to-day he was actually a millionaire. He wondered if the thought was running in her mind. Suddenly he was conscious of a resentment toward Jimmy. He tried to put it from him. Jimmy was his friend, his benefactor.

"He surely will," he agreed enthusiastically.

"He is very fond of you," she said irrelevantly.

He smiled.

"I return the regard."

"Of course. Everyone loves Jimmy."

He could not be sure of it, but he imagined that her breath left her bosom lingeringly, as though she sighed. Again he fought against that resentment toward Jimmy. He was glad that the entrance of the maid interrupted conversation for a moment.

There was no fish. Roast beef followed the soup, and with it were served roasted potatoes and string-beans. It was, in its essentials, a homely dinner, and yet Baird felt that never had he sat down before so exquisite a meal. Possibly its quality lay in the serving, but, more probably, it lay in his hostess.

He could not be sure that she deliberately steered the conversation away from Jimmy, but during the rest of the meal they talked of other things. He told her of his brief experience at the front, an experience that had comprised no actual fighting, and she commiserated prettily with him upon his ill luck in not having had a crack at the *boche* himself.

Coffee was served in the little drawing-room, and afterward she consented to sing for him. Her speaking voice was rich, sensuous, warm, and he was a bit disappointed when she sang. He had no particular ear himself, but he recognized that, while her voice was well trained, it held no particular elements of greatness. However, it was sweet and pleasing. She whirled around on the piano-stool as she finished the Irish love-song.

"Like it?" she asked.

"Immense—wonderful—great!" he told her.

"You know perfectly well it's nothing of the sort," she laughed. "It's the bane of my life. I don't think that I'm really a lady, Captain Baird." He looked his surprise. She nodded. "I have tricks that—now, with all my training—*years* of it—I should sing well. But I don't. Not the sort of thing that well-bred young women should sing. But another kind of song—— Do you know the 'Rocking-Chair Blues'?" He shook his head. "Listen to me," she said.

It was the sort of song that had superseded the old-fashioned coon-song. Filled with minors, with quavers—it was "jazz." And she sang it in a way that set Baird's toes to tapping on the rug. It was the sort of song that musical revues and "advanced" vaudeville singers feature. It was a song that depended upon that thing known as "personality."

And she had it! Baird knew vaudeville, and he knew musical comedy. Eileen Elsing would never do for a romantic lead, but what she would do with the right sort of soubrette part. He told her so. She flushed with pleasure.

"I think I'm low," she confided. "I ought to be ashamed of doing this sort of thing, but—if I couldn't be a *real* singer, I'd rather be an eccentric *comédienne*. Want to hear a secret?"

"Thrilled," he assured her.

"Aronstein offered me the feature-part in the 'The Girl You Love.'"

"A manager?"

"The musical-comedy manager. The new type of thing—the kind that features a singing soubrette."

He crushed his cigarette upon an ash-tray.

"But you—I don't understand."

"Simple thing, though; I applied for a place. He asked me to sing. Gave me this song. I sang it. Asked me to dance. One hundred and fifty a week, and—I may take it."

He stared at her.

"You may take it? But I thought——" He paused abruptly.

"Thought what?" she asked.

"Well—er—I understood that you and Mr. Blackmar—that you were to marry him."

"What made you think so?"

His eye rested on her bosom.

"That pin, for one thing."

She colored.

"Silly little fib, wasn't it? But I didn't—there's no reason, when a girl isn't really engaged—even if I were, must I tell every man that I meet?"

He laughed.

"Certainly not. But—this theater business."

"Well, it's nice to know that I *could*—add to my income. Anybody'd like to know that, wouldn't they?"

"But you say that you may take it?"

She laughed.

"I may marry you, Captain Baird. I may go to

Korea to-morrow morning. So many things that one *may* do! I shall probably do none of them."

"Oh, don't say that! The first suggestion—that you may marry me; let's discuss it."

"It might be interesting."

"Shall we try?"

She was frankly flirtatious.

"How would you begin? Not with electric atoms, I hope?"

"I'll try to think of another opening," he promised.

"Do," she said. "Think quite a while. Then, next time you are here——"

"I am coming again?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"If I may."

She crossed her knee and leaned back against the keys of the piano.

"Captain Baird, you know perfectly well that you are coming again. You know that I'm going to see a great deal of you."

"You mean it?"

Flirtatiousness had left her manner now.

"Certainly. But why be intense? Haven't you known from the beginning that we were to know each other well?"

"I'd—*hoped* so," he stammered.

"That's the difference between a man and a woman. He hopes, wonders, guesses; the woman *knows*. That is, she knows that if the man doesn't spoil everything——"

"For instance?"

"What usually spoils the friendship of a man and a woman?"

"Marriage?" he asked, with a grin.

"Now you're trying to be clever, and you're merely horrid. The man wanting marriage—that's what does it."

"I promise," he said, "not to want to marry you any more than I can help."

"Fair enough," she said gravely. "If you didn't want to a little—quite a little—I should lose interest in you."

"I shall want to—quite a little."

"Nice man!" she said. A tiny clock struck ten. "It is time, Captain Baird, that I sent you home."

"So early?"

"I shall be a busy girl to-morrow. In three minutes, I want to deliver myself into the hands of my maid. Which means that in two minutes you must be gone."

In the hall, he bowed over her hand.

"I have had the most—the most delightful evening of my life," he told her.

"You're too good to be true, Captain Baird. Or, possibly, you're too true to be good—for me."

"And just what does that mean?" he asked.

"Ask me some other time. Perhaps I'll answer," she smiled.

He felt her warm hand in his own, and then—he was in the hall outside. What had she meant? That there was a chance for him to win her? He breathed deeply. Plenty of time to find out. She

wasn't going to marry Blackmar right away. He could be sure of that.

A man was waiting for the elevator as Baird emerged from it on the ground floor. It was Blackmar. Baird started to speak; then something resentful, something fiercely angry bade him be silent. Blackmar, preoccupied, did not notice the face of the man who passed him. Under pretense of adjusting his scarf, Baird paused before a mirror in the hall. He stood there long enough to hear Blackmar say curtly to the elevator-man,

"Miss Elsing's apartment."

At ten o'clock at night! And she had told him that she was retiring early. What a fool, what a fool he was! Across Fifty-ninth Street to the Circle and thence down Broadway he walked, taking tremendous strides, easing the wrath within him by the physical exertion.

But before he had reached the Tramby, common sense had cooled wrath. Why should Miss Elsing, having an engagement, inform him of the fact? And as for the hour— He laughed. This was New York, where night is made day. No scandal would attach to her because Blackmar visited her at 10 P. M. Of course, there were certain social laws, but Eileen Elsing, he shrewdly suspected, was a law unto herself.

Blackmar was almost engaged to her. Instead of berating the girl in his heart, he should be grateful to her for her kindly tact. Good Lord, he'd only known her three days! What did he expect from

so brief an acquaintance? He was living in New York now, not Donchester.

His pace slackened. His lips softened. She had kissed him when he fastened the pin to her gown. His mouth hardened again. Why should she accept jewelry from Blackmar? That pearl necklace, too. But where did he come into criticize her? Was it any of his business? Jimmy Ladd knew about Blackmar giving her presents. If Jimmy could stand it, Baird could. He'd have to, he decided philosophically.

X

THE night clerk's wink was extremely knowing. He spoke to Baird from the corner of his mouth, Broadway's approved fashion of communicating information that is quasi-confidential.

"Little lady waiting for you, Captain," he said.

Baird looked bewildered. The last half-mile of his walk home had been given over to visions, great dreams wherein he played heroic rôles on the stage of finance, and in which Eileen Elsing had the part opposite him. From his mind had departed all worry, all uncertainty. Even Blackmar's late visit no longer disturbed him. There can be no great play in which there is no conflict. Blackmar supplied the opposition essential to conflict.

But his head, which had been in the clouds, dropped until it stood only a few feet higher than the desk across which the night clerk handed him his key. "Little lady," the clerk called her. Unused to Broadway jargon as he was, Baird nevertheless was subconsciously aware that when a man refers to a woman as a "*little* lady," he means that she is, possibly, little, but emphatically not a lady.

His views as to what constituted gentility on the part of a woman had undergone radical changes in the last few days. His Donchester standards had

been thrown by the board. He was not prepared to admit that those old standards were wrong, but he was assuredly not prepared to admit that they were the only right ones. Such an admission would be tantamount to clouding Eileen Elsing's title to gentility. For she frankly did things that Donchester girls wouldn't do. For a moment, he wildly thought that, for some incredible but delightful reason, it was Eileen who waited for him. But the clerk disabused him of the idea before it had really been planted in his mind.

"A peppy brunette, Captain. The real jazz, I'd say."

"Where is the lady waiting?" asked Baird. He emphasized the word "lady" slightly.

The clerk lost some of his easiness. He pointed toward a reception-room. Baird wheeled and walked stiffly across the lobby.

There was only one person in the reception-room when he entered. Boldly pretty, dressed rather loudly, there was something vaguely familiar about her. She looked up with a smile as Baird approached.

"Don't recognize me, do you, Mr. Baird?" The overhead light gleamed upon two rows of very white and capable teeth.

"I'm sorry," said Baird; "but I——"

"Oh, perhaps you wouldn't. Most of the boys who ate at Smithson's would, though." She tossed her head with patent coquetry.

Smithson's! Baird knew the place well. It was

a lunch-room where Donchester's busiest men gathered at the noon-hour.

"Why, yes," said Baird; "I do remember you now."

She smiled complacently.

"I thought you would when I gave you a hint. Great old place, Smithson's! I used to have a lot of fun working there. Of course"—and she shrugged—"I've got a bit above that now. So've you—haven't you?"

"Eh?" Baird was confused. "Why, I don't know exactly——"

"Oh, I do," she said airily. "Chumming round with Jimmy Ladd and his crowd is different from eating one of Smithson's stews."

She leaned back in the gorgeously upholstered chair in which Baird had found her. From her manner, Baird took it that she intended to stay quite a while. Resentment held him; there was certainly no reason why a waitress who had served him in a Donchester lunch-room should think the relation justification for renewing the acquaintance in New York. And at this hour and place. Yet, somehow, he felt nervous. He hid his resentment.

"You are—working—in New York?" he ventured.

She crossed her knees in leisurely manner. Eileen Elsing had done the same thing an hour or so ago, and modesty had not been affronted. But this girl managed to reveal the larger part of a plump calf. Her shoes, Baird noted, had evidently cost a large sum, with their black patent-leather lowers and white-buck uppers.

She leaned forward, throwing open her coat—of some imitation fur, Baird decided. An evening gown, of pale blue, very daring in cut, gave hint of an opulent bosom.

"'Working?'" she echoed. "W-e-ll, yes. I came over here a couple of months ago, Mr. Baird. Chorus. Show flivvered. A girl must do something. The waiters' strike gave me my chance to earn a dollar or two. That's where I saw you—at the Central. And that hundred you slipped me——" She lowered her eyes with an affectation of modesty. Yet the glance that she shot at him from beneath her lowered lids was shrewdly appraising. Baird remembered her now. His own embarrassment was not feigned as he looked away.

"Why, yes, of course. Glad it was of assistance," he said.

She looked up now.

"Oh, it was all of that," she said.

There was something mocking in her voice, something that set Baird's nerves on edge.

"A girl needs the kale to get started in this town," she said. "To get her chance."

"Yes?" He tried to be politely interested.

"Uh-huh." She nodded. "You can have the looks and the talent—everything, but—well, one thing, you need clothes."

"Yes?" he said again.

"That show that flivvered. I was getting thirty a week, and was an understudy with opportunity. Well—getting another job in the middle of the

winter isn't easy. That's why I took the Central job."

"So you said," he remarked.

"Yep. But the job won't last. No good, anyway. Now, in the spring I guess that I can land in some new production. Only, I don't want to wait until spring for a chorus job. I want something sure. I want my chance."

He eyed her speculatively. He thought that he understood now, and he could have sighed with relief.

"I think I understand," he told her.

For a moment, their eyes met; then sparks flashed in hers.

"I'm not so dead sure that you do," she said tartly. "Get one thing into your head, Mr. Baird: I'm not that kind. I'm not asking any man to pay my bills. Not on the usual understanding."

He waved his hands apart.

"I don't think that I do understand," he said.

"I'll explain," she said tartly. "The same management that produced this flivver that I was in is going to produce another show this spring. I'm to have a place in the chorus. I don't want it. I want a part. I'm good enough to have one, too, and they know it. But—I haven't any influence at all. I know that I'll make good in time; they'll give me my chance later on, but—I don't want to wait. If I had a few thousand to put into the show—do you get me?"

"I'm afraid that I don't," he answered.

"Oh, yes, you do," she retorted. "I've made it pretty plain, I think."

Baird laughed.

"But, my dear young lady, what makes you think that, even if I wanted to help you, I would be able to do so?"

"Poverty-stricken young men don't hand around hundred-dollar tips."

He smiled.

"It was New Year's eve."

She leaned farther forward.

"And lots of things happen on New Year's eve, don't they?"

Back with a rush came the uneasiness, the sense of panic, almost, that had been with him when first he entered the reception-room.

"I don't think I understand," he said stiffly. His palms were moist, and he felt color stealing into his cheeks.

"I'm not sure that I do," she said. "But—stopping at the Tramby—you were a bookkeeper for Robbins & Robbins before the war. And army pay don't mount up very rapidly."

"Do you mind telling me what you are driving at?" he asked.

"I don't know myself—yet," she said. "But—next week I'll know a whole lot. Frankie Landers will be out then."

"'Out?'"

"Of jail—Blackwell's, if you want to know. Ten days for assault. Mean anything in your young life?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know the gentleman."

Her lips pursed.

"Maybe you don't. That doesn't matter. What does matter is: do you want Franklie Landers to know you?"

"You're rather cryptic, aren't you?" he asked.

"Meaning I puzzle you? *Do* I?"

He essayed a smile.

"I tell you that you do."

"And you aren't telling all that you know." She stared at him. "I can keep my mouth shut as *tight* —if I get mine."

He rose abruptly.

"My dear young lady——"

"Holben is the name. Fannie Holben."

"My dear Miss Holben, then. I really haven't the faintest idea what is behind all this. What I do understand is that you wish me to finance you so that you may acquire an interest in a musical play. But I am not a wealthy patron of the arts, Miss Holben. I'm sorry, but——"

"You're no patron of the arts, eh?" she said. "Very well. And I'm no blackmailer. But you can't tell, in this man's world, what anyone is going to be by to-morrow, Mr. Baird."

"And what"—he strove to keep his voice level—"what on earth would anyone blackmail me for?"

"That's what I'm not sure of, Mr. Baird. If I were sure—— Well, have it your own way. It's all right with me. I may have made a big mistake. What's the number of your room, Mr. Baird?"

"I'M NO BLACKMAILER, MR. BAIRD."

"My room-number?" Something sharp seemed to pierce his heart. No pain like this had come to him on that morning when his transport had been attacked by a submarine. He told her the number.

"Would it help you any in getting my point of ... I told you that Frankie Landers had the ...om—on New Year's eve?"

...t his face was glowing, he knew. Yet he kept ...es fixed upon hers.

"You still speak in riddles, Miss Holben. If you ...e more definite, if I knew what you meant, I might ... angry, but——"

"But you aren't? Well, it's kind of you. I'll say that much," she said. She rose abruptly to her feet and shook down the folds of her gown. "This isn't an easy town to get by in, Mr. Baird. Not for a girl. Look at me—high boots with an evening dress. Do you know, lots of women will do lots of things for just a pair of the right kind of shoes?"

"Men, too," he agreed.

"Ye-ah. Even your kind of man, brought up correct and all that sort of thing—give him the right bait, and he'll bite." He merely looked at her. Her shoulders lifted in an exaggerated shrug. "Oh, well, no harm done, is there, Mr. Baird? If I've made a mistake, no harsh feelings, eh?"

"None at all," he assured her.

"And if I haven't made a mistake, why—I'll be round again, Mr. Baird. I want to talk to you some more."

"Thank you. I—er——"

"Oh, yes; I understand. You've seen all you want

of me, but—maybe I haven't seen all I want of you, Mr. Baird. They tell me that it's possible to visit people on Blackwell's. I'm going to pay Frankie Landers a visit."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And then I'll see you again. Frankie's a hard ticket, Mr. Baird. I think that I'd rather do business with you."

He laughed; it was a fair rendition of amused exasperation.

"There is some absurd mistake running around in your head, Miss Holben, and——"

"Oh, well, let it run there. Do it good. Exercise the old bean. Good-night, Mr. Baird."

She gave him her hand; her fingers touched his a moment. Before he could offer to escort her to the door and find her a taxi, she had walked away from him. Conscious that the eyes of the hotel clerk were upon him, Baird walked over to the desk. The snub he had administered to the man a while ago was still ranking. His smile was supercilious.

"I think I've seen your friend before, Captain."

"Yes? An old acquaintance," said Baird. "I haven't seen her for years. Almost forgot I knew her."

Nothing was to be gained by antagonizing the man. Moreover, there was information that Baird wished from him. He looked sly.

"She's rather pretty, you know."

"You said it," agreed the clerk. "She could know me any old time at all. I wouldn't swear

to it, but—she looks like a chicken I've seen around with Frankie Landers."

"Landers? Frankie Landers?"

Baird fumbled with his key. He pretended to hide a yawn.

"Yeh—you've heard of him. One of the biggest gamblers on Broadway. Used to run a house in the Forties. Swell place. Quit it when the war broke out. Hasn't any place now that I know of, though they say that he runs a stud-poker game once in a while that helps him keep the wolf away."

"Live here?" Baird asked casually.

The clerk shrugged.

"As much here as anywhere. Always has a room here. Next to yours, it is. But he's quite a guy for parties. Hasn't shown up since New Year's eve. Nothing unusual in that, though. He takes his room by the year. I suppose that he's easing off in some country town. He usually does that when he's been on a big party."

"Maybe he's in jail," ventured Baird.

The clerk guffawed.

"Who? Him? Frankie Landers? Well, if he was, the papers would run a page about it. Jailed? For being drunk? Guess again, Captain. There ain't a cop on Broadway or anywhere else in this town would pinch him. And if there was, all he'd have to do is tell the judge his name. That's all. No; he's resting up somewhere—maybe in a cure. He's done it before."

"And the lady—you've seen her with him?" asked Baird.

The clerk waved an airy hand.

"I'm probably wrong. Just an idea, that's all. Anything I can do for you, Captain?"

"Nothing, thank you. Good-night."

"Night," said the clerk. He turned back to the magazine that he had been reading, while Baird walked to the elevator.

His lips were compressed when he began taking off his clothing. A weaker man, he felt, would begin making preparations for flight at once. But not he! To-morrow, he had already decided, he would hunt a place to live. Until to-morrow, his luck would not change too abruptly. And if it did! If some one claimed this money—but he had already thrashed that out. Let that some one prove the exact amount that had been in the trunk. The burden of proof that Baird had taken some of the money would be upon the claimant.

He tried to think of Eileen Elsing. But he could not. Fannie Holben had taken her place in Baird's mind. How much did Fannie Holben know? Certainly not much, or else her blackmail would have been definite. How much did she suspect?

XI

DERRIBY'S is not unique. New York has other fashionable restaurants where the lights are subdued, the waiters noiseless, the orchestra soothing, the food excellent. But Derriby's is older than most of the others. In the days when it was venturesome, fast almost, to give a private dance outside one's own home, it was correct to have the function at Derriby's. One who would have hesitated to engage the ballroom of a hotel had no qualms about arranging for the exclusive use for an evening of one of Derriby's upper rooms. One explained it at first by saying that it was so upsetting to the domestic arrangements to give a large party at home. Explanations soon became unnecessary. It was not needful to impress upon one's guests the fact that one had a ballroom in one's own mansion, for mansions began to vanish from Fifth Avenue with the approach of trade. Many of the most correct persons lived in apartment-houses. The newer hotels got their share of the private-entertainment trade, but Derriby's stood alone. Derriby's was another home to the established of New York.

But, though the world knew of Derriby's, only the initiate were aware that Derriby's, in addition to be-

ing a famous restaurant, was also a bachelor apartment-house.

It was the merest chance that brought Baird there. He awoke in the morning thoroughly refreshed. The breath of danger brought him no panic this morning. To-night he would make arrangements with Jimmy Ladd for his future; those arrangements would enable him to replace what money from the canvas trunk that he might use. Let Miss Holben or the mysterious Frankie Landers make demands upon him! Those demands must be accompanied by proofs, and—he would not worry. Only, he must move immediately.

He did not know what sort of place he wished to live in, save that it must be an apartment. Hotels were not private enough. So he glanced through the "For Rent" columns of the morning paper. One advertisement appealed to him.

Bachelor going abroad will rent two furnished rooms and bath to responsible tenant. Exclusive location. Suitable reference. Immediate possession.

It was the "immediate possession" that drew him across the room to the telephone and made him ask Central for the telephone-number signed to the advertisement.

A man answered. Baird gave his name. The advertiser gave his own—George Climsby. Mr. Baird would not mind giving references? "Mr. James McPherson Ladd, junior?" Climsby's voice became im-

mediately cordial. Would Mr. Baird care to come over at once?

Baird would. Climsby gave him the address, and Baird taxied over immediately after breakfast. And at two in the afternoon, Climsby was registered in some hotel, and Baird's trunk was deposited in the Climsby apartment on the fourth floor of Derriby's.

Baird had intended to pay for his rooms about eighty dollars a month. Yet his hand did not shake as he signed a lease which obligated him to pay to the attorneys of George Climsby two hundred and fifty dollars a month for six months. At the end of that time, Climsby's attorney—Climsby himself was shortly going to South America—would sell the furniture, and Derriby's could lease the apartment to whom they chose.

The rent that he was to pay was exactly fifty dollars a month more than his salary had been when Robbins & Robbins employed him. It was sheer insanity, and yet—the rooms were delightful. The furnishings were exquisite yet thoroughly masculine. Four stories below the front-room windows, Fifth Avenue stretched. Compunction, fear fell from Baird as the door closed upon Climsby and he was alone in his new home.

Life was a gamble. One who refused to gamble won no high stakes. And high stakes were all that made life worth the living. This address of his would mean money in the bank, he told himself. People were judged by the obvious things—their clothing, their manners, their homes. It was unfair, but—strangers had no time in which to inquire into the

inner souls of other strangers. They took men for what they seemed to be, and he, Rodney Baird, would be taken for an extremely prosperous citizen. Which meant that he would be given consideration, opportunity that would never have been offered to a Donchester bookkeeper.

That he had just paid an advance of two hundred and fifty dollars, that his valet-service would cost at least fifteen dollars a week—not to have engaged such service would have been out of keeping with the part that he intended to play—that having his breakfast served from the restaurant below—Climsby had told him that this was a service rendering the rooms doubly desirable—would cost him a weekly sum beyond what he had ever dreamed, a week ago, of paying. Well, it did not matter. To-night he would know what salary he might expect from the Ladds, and in the meantime he would not fret. A man who started off in New York as he might start in Donchester was a fool. New York was for the successful; the successful were those who gave evidences of success. New York would be for him.

Before leaving the Tramby, he had sent a boy to a stationer's for paper and twine. Now, his door securely locked, he opened his own big trunk. From it he took the canvas trunk. He opened it and placed its contents within his own heavy trunk, which he closed. This merely "in case" the *valet de chambre* might unlock the door without knocking.

The canvas trunk was not too stout. Baird weighed one hundred and seventy-five pounds, and the drive that he could impart to his heels was power-

ful. It took him less than ten minutes to reduce the trunk to a mass of splinters. It took only ten minutes more to make a bundle of the splinters, wrap them in the heavy paper that a Tramby bell-boy had procured, and tie the paper securely.

Carefully he printed upon the outside: "John J. Pelton, Peoria, Illinois." He eyed the bundle complacently. If there happened to be a John J. Pelton in Peoria, he would be rather surprised at the contents of the package that he would receive in a day or so. Baird permitted himself a chuckle. He picked up the bundle and left his rooms.

Twenty minutes later, he was back in them again. The bundle had been expressed from the Grand Central. He had given, as shipper, another fictitious name. The clerk who had accepted the package had been a near-sighted old man. He would never be able to recognize Baird in the improbable case that the pieces of the trunk were traced. Rather a clever fancy, that of smashing it. A man may carry a bundle, but carrying a trunk arouses comment sometimes. He would never be traced.

In a stationer's in the Grand Central, he had bought several dozen large envelopes. Into these he jammed the bills that he had taken from the canvas trunk. Fifteen hundred dollars he kept out, putting the money in his pocketbook. Then he put the envelopes in his suitcase, which he carefully locked.

A search of the classified telephone directory furnished him the names of a dozen storage warehouses. He selected the nearest, on Columbus Avenue in the

Seventies. Suitcase in hand, he walked from his rooms to the elevator.

A uniformed boy carried the bag to a taxi. Baird smiled as he tipped the youth. Twenty-five cents for having been guardian and carrier of two hundred thousand dollars!

He held the taxi while he entered the storage warehouse. He was out again in ten minutes, and he breathed easily. His suitcase and its immensely valuable contents were safe. He scoffed at the thought that unpleasantly protruded itself into his mind—that his actions might be run down, analyzed. He shook his head. Impossible!

Of course, he told himself defiantly, as his taxi took him toward the Avenue again, he had not the slightest intention of profiting any more than he had already done. It would be his first action to replace the money that he had taken. No claimant had called for the money; there was nothing very wrong in using some of it temporarily.

It was a line of reasoning, however, that he did not care to pursue. Definitely he had taken a step; only a coward would regret the step a moment afterward. That step would undoubtedly lead to success. No one would suffer by the step. Not a penny would be lost to the owner of the money that had so strangely found its way into his room at the Tramby. In a month or so he would replace most of what he had taken, and—he wouldn't think about it.

Almost opposite Derriby's was a bank that kept open until early evening. He had his taxi-man deposit him here. He emerged from the building five

minutes after he had entered, the possessor of a check-book and a bank-book in which the receiving teller had scribbled the figures, "1500." Mention of Jimmy Ladd's name and the fact that he had had an account in a Donchester bank were sufficient introduction.

He walked across the street and through the portals of Derriby's. It was not quite the tea-hour, but the musicians were tuning up. He glanced into the main dining-room. The polished floor, the rich furnishings—he must dine here shortly.

Retracing his steps, he crossed the main hall and entered the grill. Not to quiet his nerves now, but, because he felt like it, he had the bartender mix him a cocktail. He sipped it slowly. He was pleasantly warmed by it, felt cheerfully inclined toward all the world as he ascended to his rooms.

His own rooms! He wondered idly what the furnishings of the place had cost Climsby. It was quite possible that, when the six months had expired, he might purchase them. Though, probably, he'd want his own things then. Still, a chap could always be learning. That oil-painting on the wall of the living-room seemed rather good. A tyro could tell that.

He examined the bathroom. It was quite large, big enough for a fellow to splash around without wetting the walls. He'd always fancied having the tub set in the center of the room.

The heavy fixtures of the hand-basin—silver-seeming—the tiled flooring— He wandered again into the bedroom. A brass bed was all very well, but this

narrow mahogany four-poster was—well, it was the real thing.

He walked into the living-room and sat down before the broad window that looked out upon the Avenue. He sat there a long time; lights began to twinkle from windows, on automobiles. At last, with a sigh, he rose from his chair.

Some one knocked upon the door. He opened it. It was a uniformed employee.

"Could I do anything for you, sir? Shave, sir? Lay out your clothing for the evening, sir?"

Well, it was worth fifteen dollars a week to have even the part-time of so perfect a servant as this.

"You might unpack my trunk," said Baird, "and——" He thought rapidly. Jimmy Ladd was motherless; there would be no ladies present, and the dinner jacket fitted better than the other. "My dinner suit," he told the man.

"Yes, sir." The valet nodded. He handed Baird the evening paper.

The valet—he paused in the midst of arranging Baird's belongings to vouchsafe the information that his name was Grannan—started the water running in the tub. Baird began undressing.

The tub had a shower. Baird was beneath it, disdaining the rubber curtains, when the telephone-bell rang. He shut off the water to listen to Grannan as he answered it.

"Beg pardon, ma'am?" he heard Grannan say. Then: "Yes, ma'am. Of course, ma'am. Circle, two-two-four-seven-nine."

"What was it?" called Baird, as Grannan hung up.

"A lady, sir. I told her you couldn't come to the 'phone, sir. She gave me the number. I've written it down, sir. She wishes you to call her up."

Baird's lips tightened. He rubbed himself dry. But he did not go to the telephone until Grannan had finished his ministrations and left the room. Then he asked Central for Circle, two-two-four-seven-nine. He recognized the voice of Fannie Holben at once.

"This is Mr. Baird," he said. "You called me."

The girl laughed.

"You didn't make a very successful disappearance, Mr. Baird."

"I left my telephone-number with the clerk at the Tramby," he retorted stiffly.

"Meaning that you weren't trying to lose me? All right." She was quite friendly of tone, almost cordial. "Just thought I'd give you a ring, Mr. Baird. Frankie Landers got out this afternoon. I'm having dinner with him to-night."

"Yes?" Baird's voice was cold.

"I thought you might be interested."

"I can't understand why I should be," he told her.

"Well, perhaps not. But I wanted you to know that, when I meet an old friend, I don't forget him right away."

"That's kind of you."

"Oh, I'm full of these kindly traits. You'd like me if you knew me better, Mr. Baird."

"I'm certain of that," he said.

"So'm I. Well, I just wanted to keep you think-

ing of me—that's all. I've got a week in which to buy into that show, you know."

"Have you told Mr. Landers that?" he asked.

"Oh, Frankie always wants to know exactly what he's buying with his money, Mr. Baird. I shan't talk to Frankie about it—yet."

There was a sudden menace in her last word, emphasized by the fact that the receiver clicked immediately upon it. Baird's face was white as he put on his hat and coat.

Still—what did she know? Nothing. What did she suspect? Nothing tangible. She was running a bluff, and when he called, she had nothing to show.

He looked about his rooms. He could live in Donchester and work for Robbins & Robbins for twenty years and not be able to do himself as well as this. One got nothing in this world without fighting. He'd fight.

He switched out the lights and went into the hall. A ring brought a silent elevator to his floor. Swiftly he was deposited in the hall on the ground floor. From the main restaurant came the sounds of the subdued orchestra. He paused a moment and glanced in. The huge reception-room was thronged with well-groomed men and marvelously well-dressed women. These were the rich who were used to being rich.

Well, the easiest thing in the world to become accustomed to is wealth, as the hardest is to poverty. It wouldn't take him long to become used to it.

XII

JAMES McPHERSON LADD, senior, looked what he was, a pillar of the church, a subscriber to charities, and the head of a huge business. He fulfilled all requirements of the conventional picture of a financier, even to the side-whiskers.

Only his eyes differed from the generally prevalent conception of the great financier. For the eyes of James McPherson Ladd, senior, betrayed him. They were blue, intensely alive, but their dominant characteristic was mild good humor. They seemed to find amusement in everything. Baird got the impression that the financier was secretly rather tickled than otherwise at his son's industrious sowing of wild oats.

There are men who are always spectators, who sit on the bleachers or grand stands and cheer the participants in the games in which they are too indifferent to take a personal part. Baird conceived old Ladd as one of these. He had devoted himself strictly to his knitting. He had been a faithful husband and a generous father.

But his son Jimmy had inherited considerable of the proclivities of the elder Ladd's grandfather, who had established a fur trade in Canada and had ventured in teas and spices from the Orient. It seemed

to Baird that old Ladd recognized that Jimmy's wildness had simply been the urge of stirring blood.

A dignified butler passed round cocktails in the library, whither Baird had been conducted on his arrival.

"Father," demanded Jimmy, "how can you tempt me? Knowing that I have sworn the great vow——"

The blue eyes of the senior Ladd twinkled. Baird read the tremendous pride in the son in those mild eyes.

"James," said the father, "I have exacted no pledges. I have asked nothing. It is true"—and he smiled at Baird—"that I am venturing an occasional prayer to Fate that I will be spared the agony of reading of my own bankruptcy in the papers some morning, but—no pledges, my son. There is only one reason for the making of a pledge—the opportunity it affords for breaking it."

"A quaint philosophy, father. A sweet, benign philosophy. Almost you tempt me; but—I'm off the stuff, your reverence." Ladd shook his head at the butler, who fought desperately to iron out his grin.

The elder Ladd eyed his glass.

"Captain Baird, you are one of those who can—er—take it or leave it alone?"

"He sure is! So am I," laughed Jimmy. "The only trouble with me is that I can't do both."

The old gentleman inclined his head toward Baird. He drank his cocktail. Baird swallowed his. The elder Ladd moved toward the electrically-operated elevator in which Baird had ascended to the library.

It was an ordinary enough scene, but Baird was

conscious of a sporting element in old man Ladd. He had exacted, he said, no pledges from Jimmy. He was going to let the responsibility of a partnership in the firm sober his son. Well, he went at it in exactly the right fashion. If Jimmy had the stuff in him, he'd make good. Keeping liquor out of his sight would help not at all. The old man was wise. Jimmy was not a child, and grown men must make their own decisions.

Dinner was served in a room whose proportions made Baird think of a baronial hall. Indeed, the whole house, occupying, as it did, half a block on Madison Avenue, reminded him of a feudal castle. The very iron fence round its strip of lawn seemed to speak of numerous retainers, of guarded wealth.

James McPherson Ladd, senior, was not merely a millionaire—he was an *established* millionaire. His fortune was too firmly founded for failure—despite his jests—ever to threaten it. And Rodney Baird, lately bookkeeper for Robbins & Robbins, was to become a part of the machinery that turned out granite mansions, liveried servants. He was quite unconscious of the fact that the oysters were succulent, that the soup was delicious.

It was not until dessert had succeeded a salad that the elder Ladd turned the talk to personal channels. Up to now, he had been content to exchange pleasantries with Jimmy—pleasantries that concerned the possibility of Jimmy discharging all the stenographers and engaging chorus-girls in their places, and such matters. Baird gathered the impression again, and more strongly, that the elder

man adored his son, was proud of him, and, perhaps, secretly envied him his laxities. Yet he could understand that, with all his love and pride in his boy, the old gentleman could fly into fury. Mild eyes can become angry.

"Was there any particular branch of our business that appealed to you, Captain Baird?" asked the old man.

Baird smiled deprecatingly.

"I think, Mr. Ladd, that opportunity is all that I've hoped for."

"Pish, tush, and again tush," said Jimmy. "What we want is a confidential man. Not an ordinary private secretary—we can get scores of them. The firm needs a man to sort of look things over, decide where some jazz is required, get an angle on men, maybe investigate propositions that are put up to us—not from the technical angle but from the human."

"It's a large order, Jimmy," said Baird.

"Why is it? A man who can command troops knows something of human nature. Not afraid of the job, are you, Rod?"

Baird colored.

"I'm anxious to tackle it, but—I'm not as confident as you are, Jimmy, of my ability."

"I am," said the elder Ladd surprisingly.

Baird looked gratefully at him. The old man smiled.

"This son of mine, Captain Baird, is a ne'er-do-well young blackguard—a scoundrel, sir." His mild eyes shot an affectionate gleam at Jimmy. "But one

thing, in all his wild moments, he avoided doing—he never let himself be fooled by anyone. He always knew exactly where everyone stood, and exactly what they wanted. He's dropped into the office, taken a look round, and told me that one of my men was enriching himself illegitimately. It proved true. I don't know how he does it, but—he does."

Jimmy rose in his seat. He bowed low across the table.

"I thank you, sir. From the bottom—I might even say the dregs, sir—of my heart, I thank you."

His father shook his head.

"Laugh it off, my boy, but one thing, Jimmy, about you—you're honest. And the critically honest man is never deceived by others."

" 'Critically honest?' " asked Baird.

"The man," responded the elder Ladd, "who dares to look at himself. The man who questions his own motives. Jimmy is that sort, though he may not know it. One of the reasons that I always forgive Jimmy, no matter what he does, is because he has never lied, because, indeed, he always gives himself the worst of his explanations. There are many secrets of success, Captain Baird, but the chiefest one is honesty. I mean a success that is spiritual as well as material. The honest man, the critically honest man, understands the weaknesses of others because he does not camouflage his own. Knowing the weaknesses of others—and his own—he discounts them; he reads motives before they have come into existence."

"And I'm all of that, am I?" chuckled Jimmy. "Rod, I'm some bear-cat!"

His father laughed.

"Your word is sufficient voucher for Captain Baird, at any rate."

"And I'll make you hustle; I'll make you earn your salary, Captain!" cried Jimmy. A thought came to him. "Speaking of salary—a couple of thousand a month to begin? All right?"

Baird's heart almost stopped beating. But his voice was casual as he answered:

"Perfectly—if I only knew my duties."

"We'll find plenty for you," laughed Jimmy.

Baird centered his eyes upon his coffee-cup. Two thousand dollars a month! It was—no; it wasn't a dream. The hot coffee scalded his tongue. He was awake.

But the elder Ladd was almost asleep. He had reached that stage of life when food superinduces slumber.

"Don't make any apologies, father," grinned Jimmy. "I will explain to Captain Baird that you are an amateur rumhound, and that one cocktail puts you under the table. I hate," he said to Baird, "to have my sire's pitiful weakness exposed, but the old boy, Rod, honest—the old boy has lost his kick."

Mr. Ladd smiled.

"Pay no attention to my erring son, Captain. He's a disrespectful—disrespectful young"—he paused, thinking hard of some atrocious insult—"galoot."

Jimmy nodded to Baird. The two of them walked quietly from the room.

"Funny thing," said Jimmy, when they were outside, "about dad. Alive as a cricket, but"—he tapped his breast—"heart."

"Serious?" demanded Baird.

Jimmy scowled.

"Enough to make me get off the rum and behave. Never knew a thing about it until yesterday. Doctor Crowninshield gave me a lecture and tipped me off."

"He's not ill now?" demanded Baird anxiously.

Ladd shook his head.

"Not a bit. But this sleepiness—it's one of the symptoms." He guided Baird toward the hall. "Let us grab the bonnets and the capes and sally forth."

"Where to?" asked Baird.

Ladd plucked a kiss from his pursed lips and tossed it into the air.

"To Broadway, man. To-morrow is Sunday. The next day is Monday, the day on which James McPherson Ladd, junior, the apple of the eye of James McPherson Ladd, senior, sallies forth to work. There'll be no more Broadway—not for a long, long time. So I would kiss it fondly farewell to-night."

"Make a big clean-up of your affairs in Donchester?" asked Jimmy idly, as they crossed toward Fifth Avenue.

There was the least pause before Baird answered.

"Fair enough," he replied.

Within him, Baird felt an impulse to explain to Ladd. Accustomed to millions, Jimmy Ladd had the

millionaire's habit of assuming that his acquaintances were wealthy. Surely Ladd's friendship was too sincere to be founded upon a belief that Baird was rich. It would not lower Ladd's estimate of his friend to know that Baird had nothing. But—business is business. Baird was offered two thousand a month because Ladd thought that he was well-to-do. If Ladd knew that he could be hired for a fraction of that sum— He was not deceiving Ladd. Ladd was deceiving himself. Silence was extremely golden, it seemed to Baird.

Their coats checked down-stairs, Jimmy paused a moment at the entrance to the main dining-room of the Maison d'Or. Because it was Saturday night, the tables were almost all occupied, and the dancing-floor was thronged.

"Some li'l place, eh, Roddy me buck?" said Jimmy. "But there ought to be some one here to take pity on us and offer to teach us to one-step—— Who's your friend?"

A couple had stopped on the edge of the dancing-space, and the girl was waving in friendly fashion to Baird. Even as he stood, staring rather blankly at her, the couple moved toward him. He was able to notice that Miss Fannie Holben had acquired a pair of dancing-slippers to match her evening gown.

"Oh, Mr. Baird! Such a pleasure! Meet my friend, Mr. Landers."

Automatically, Baird thrust out his hand; Landers gripped it. He presented Ladd. The latter

took Miss Holben's hand. He drew it under his own arm.

"Friends, Romans, and countrymen," he announced, "I feel the call of the wild. Mr. Landers, you look like a kindly soul. You would not interfere with my innocent amusements, would you?"

"If you wanna dance, kid, go to it," said Mr. Landers.

Jimmy's arm went round the girl; they seemed to swoop out upon the floor. They were lost in the closely packed throng in a second.

Reluctantly, Baird turned toward Landers. He met a pair of hard gray eyes, set widely enough on either side of a predacious nose. High cheek-bones, over which the skin seemed drawn tightly, and a thin-lipped mouth above a square chin added to the impression of hardness.

Landers was dressed to the point of foppishness. His hair was slicked straight back from a sloping forehead. Emphatically he was not a gentleman. With equal emphasis, it could be decided that he was no dance-hound, no lizard of the hotel lounges. He was a man of action, of affairs, even though those affairs might be shady.

His lips widened as he met Baird's scrutiny.

"Fannie's been tellin' me about you, Mr. Baird. I been lookin' forward to a meetin'. Didn't hope it would be so soon as this. Come on over to my table, Mr. Baird; I wanna chew the rag with you."

"Why—er—we only dropped in for a minute, Mr. Landers," Baird protested.

"Oh, maybe I can interest you a bit, Mr. Baird. Be sociable."

His lips still smiled, but his eyes were harder than ever. Baird shrugged.

"Just as you say."

"That's nice," said Landers. He wheeled and led the way to a table.

"Drink?" he asked, as they sat down.

Baird shook his head.

"Thank you; no."

"Don't mind if I pour myself a li'l jolt, eh?"

From the bucket beside him he lifted a bottle of champagne. He poured himself a glass and drank it with apparent relish.

"Won't be able to get this much longer if the prohibitionists put it over, Mr. Baird. Sure you won't? 'S all right." He poured himself another glass. "Fannie and you quite old friends, Mr. Baird?" he asked.

Baird smiled.

"Well, not intimate, Mr. Landers."

"That's good!" Landers drained his glass. He put it down on the table. "That's fine! I'd hate to meet any gentleman that was intimate with Fannie or wanted to be intimate with her. I'm a queer guy, Mr. Baird. One of these one-woman men. And what I can't get, I won't let no one else get. Make myself clear?"

"Unnecessarily so," replied Baird.

"Well, that's fine! I'm glad to hear that. I didn't know but you was interested in Fannie. She's

been talkin' a lot about you this afternoon, Mr. Baird."

"Indeed?" Baird was guardedly polite.

"Yeah; I been doin' a little stretch on Blackwell's. Mistake, but—oh, well, business requires certain things sometimes. I got the ear of a friend this mornin', and this afternoon—well, I'm here. Fannie says you been stoppin' at the Tramby, Mr. Baird. That you had the next room to mine."

Baird's feet pressed hard upon the floor. But he lighted a cigarette calmly.

"I believe that I did," he replied. "I moved today, though."

"Took all your baggage, eh?" Landers laughed as though he had said something humorous.

"Why, yes," said Baird. Faint surprise was in his voice.

Landers leaned back in his chair. His hard eyes bored into Baird's.

"Funny about baggage," said Landers. "You know, I missed a trunk while I was on Blackwell's. Fannie say anything to you about it?"

"Why—no," said Baird. It seemed to him that his voice sounded far away.

XIII

THE orchestra ceased its whimpering minors. Jimmy Ladd and Fannie Holben stopped close to the table. The girl dropped into a chair, frankly blown. Landers looked at her with a smile. His face, that had been so hard, was mirthfully soft. He grinned at Ladd.

"You shake a wicked leg, Mr. Ladd. There ain't many gents can dance Fannie tired."

Miss Holben essayed an expression of shocked indignation.

"The way you talk, Frankie Landers, is enough to—— You're too darned fresh!"

A frown of concern appeared on Landers' forehead. Its skin looked like roughened concrete.

"Excuse me, Fannie, I—— Let's have a li'l grape." Apology was evidently beyond him. He filled her glass. She drank it thirstily, raising her eyebrows when Ladd and Baird refused the wine.

"Some dance!" she sighed, putting down her glass.

"You said it!" exclaimed Ladd. "Try another?"

The music had started up again. Miss Holben looked coquettishly at Baird. He rose promptly to his feet. With a great sigh, Ladd sank back in his chair.

"He cuts me out with all the girls," he said.

"Steals them so *quick!* Go on, Miss Holben; don't mind me. I'll console myself with a bottle of ginger ale."

"You're consoled easy," she retorted.

She danced extremely well. It was another jazz, and they were three-fourths of the way round the dancing-space before the girl spoke. Then she nodded over her shoulder.

"He's sure a bear for action—isn't he?"

Baird followed her glance to meet the grinning face of Jimmy Ladd. Then Jimmy reversed, and he saw his partner. It was Eileen. She smiled at him graciously enough, but he felt hot resentment. What was she doing here? And with whom had she come? And why did she have to see him dancing with this girl, who—— The girl spoke to him.

"How you been getting along with Frankie, Mr. Baird?"

Other couples had intervened between himself and Eileen. He looked down at the girl, whose face was too close to his own for good taste.

"Well enough," he responded. "I notice that you have a new pair of slippers."

"Yeh," she said carelessly; "I had to let Frankie play banker—a little."

"He seems anxious to play it a lot," he observed.

"Uh-huh. If I'll say, 'I do' every time the minister pauses."

"You might do a great deal worse," he told her.

"Sure! But I'm going to do a great deal better, Mr. Baird."

"He has money," ventured Baird, "hasn't he?"

She shrugged her plump shoulders.

"A lot of good it'd do me. Not that Frankie's stingy, but—he's an old-fashioned sort of guy. That's all right—laugh if you want to—but I'm telling you. Just because he's a 'gam' doesn't mean anything. That's his *business*. But take him away from business, and Frankie's the home-and-fireside boy. Why, his idea of heaven is a place where the carpet slippers are waterproofed, so you can wear them in the rain."

"Seems to me that he'd make a steady husband," said Baird.

"Well, then, I wouldn't make a steady wife," she snapped. "Think, with all I got on the ball, I'm going to pitch for him and no one else? I've got a career ahead of me. That's why I asked you for some backing."

Baird avoided the opening—or tried to.

"Landers ought to be able to——"

"I'm playing the game as square as I can," she interrupted. "Of course he'll back me—if I'll marry him. And then, somehow or other, he'll yank me off the stage."

"But if you love him?"

"Where do you get that love-stuff? The only person I love is Fannie Holben. Frankie's a nice guy. He's as square as most men. As soon as he finds out that a wedding-ring is the only way to get a girl, he either lays off or he buys the ring. But I don't want to wear it."

"Well, you don't have to, fortunately, eh?" Baird tried to laugh lightly.

"You bet I don't!" she exclaimed. "You had a nice talk with Frankie?" Her eyes were very near his own.

He managed to shrug.

"He told me that you'd mentioned me to him."

"Didn't say what I'd said?"

"Why—no. He——" Avoidance of an issue did not remove it. "He seemed interested in my baggage, for some strange reason or other."

"Yes. Frankie thinks quick. But I didn't say anything to him, Mr. Baird. I'm not going to—yet."

"I don't understand you."

"You must have a copyright on that sentence. You said it often enough the other night, Mr. Baird. But never mind. You'll get that understanding feeling by and by, maybe. Frankie talked about baggage, did he? Mention a trunk of his?"

"He did," said Baird.

"Of course that meant nothing in your young life, did it?" she asked.

"Why should it?" he countered.

"I'm not saying that it *should*. I'm asking if it did."

"Suppose, Miss Holben, that we drop a subject that I don't understand."

She laughed good-humoredly.

"Surest thing. Only, get this: When it comes to a show-down, I'm out for Fannie Holben, every minute of the day. Understand? But I forgot—you ain't understanding much these days. Never mind."

They walked, with the cessation of the music, to the table where Landers sat alone. To Baird's re-

quest that they dance the encore, the girl smiled a refusal. She patted her hair in explanation—it was tumbling down—and left the table to make repairs in her coiffure. Landers toyed with his wine-glass.

"Some chicken!" he said.

Baird nodded polite agreement.

"Ye-ah," said Landers emphatically; "workin' her way up. Been a waitress in Donchester—that's where she knew you, wasn't it, Mr. Baird?" Baird nodded again. "She's got the stage-bug bad," went on Landers. "At that, I think she's proba'ly got something. But I can't see it for her. Not for her."

"Have something better in mind?"

"Well, *I* think it's better. Marriage-stuff."

"Indeed!" Baird's tone was congratulatory.

Landers waved the congratulation aside.

"Not yet," he said. "The fact is, Fannie is kinda up-stage. I don't get it. She's busted—flat. Had to take a stake from me. First time she's ever done it, too. Yet she talks mighty big. Swears she's goin' to have a part in a new show. Goin' to have a piece of the show, too. I dunno where she's goin' to get the coin. Do you?"

He shot the question at Baird, and, despite himself, Baird felt that ever-ready flush mounting to his face.

"How should I know?" he countered.

"Well, where there's money for a girl, there's got to be a man," said Landers sagely. "I thought it might be you who was goin' to stake her."

Baird had mastered his flush now.

"I hope you don't think so any longer, Mr. Landers."

Landers waved a well-groomed hand, a too well-groomed hand.

"Oh, mistakes happen all the time, you know. I'm pretty sure you won't butt into my little affairs." He poured himself another glass of champagne. "Didn't happen to have any queer experience at the Tramby, did you, Mr. Baird?"

" 'Queer experience?' " Baird echoed.

"Uh-huh. Didn't miss anything, did you, when you was leavin'?"

"Why, no. What made you think——"

"Oh, they ain't as careful who they hire as they ought to be. I missed a trunk, like I was tellin' you."

"You've notified the hotel people?"

Lander's eyebrows lifted.

"Why—er—no. I usually settle my own troubles myself, Mr. Baird."

"But theft—the police——"

Landers laughed harshly.

"I never trouble the police about my affairs. And they don't trouble me. Not often, that is. This Blackwell's affair—— Oh, well, my affairs don't interest you, Mr. Baird."

Baird laughed.

"They're rather entertaining."

"I suppose so," grunted the gambler. "Ah, with us again, Mr. Ladd?"

Jimmy Ladd sat down.

"Eileen wants to see you, Rod," he said. "Trot

along, I'll take good care of Miss Holben while you're gone."

Landers chuckled.

"Some nerve you got, young feller! But don't mind me. Tell Fannie, when she gets back, not to think I've left her. I'm goin' out for a little while."

"She'll never miss you, Mr. Landers," grinned Jimmy.

"You'll say so, eh?"

Landers seemed to have taken an instantaneous fancy to Jimmy Ladd. But then, Baird mused, as he crossed the dance floor, everyone liked Jimmy Ladd.

Eileen was at a table in a box, upon a sort of low balcony. Beside her was Blackmar, dressed, as ever, to the minute. He excused himself almost immediately. He saw some one, he explained, to whom he wished to speak.

"So," said Eileen, "you go on parties, dance to jazz music. I pictured you alone, Captain Baird, looking forward to the moment when you would see me."

"I had no such picture of you," he told her.

"You shouldn't," she said. "Who is the pretty girl that you and Jimmy are rushing so strongly?"

" 'Rushing?' I hardly know her."

"I'm glad of that. I suppose that, if you were old friends, she'd dance even closer. She's quite won Jimmy's heart. He raved about her."

"To see how you'd take it," suggested Baird.

She shook her head.

"Jimmy isn't quite as transparent as that, Cap-

tain. In fact, he's never as transparent as he seems. Who is she?"

"I knew her in Donchester," said Baird. "Shall we dance?" he asked.

"I'd rather not," she rejoined. "I didn't come here to dance."

"No? Merely to look on?"

"Mr. Blackmar had an appointment."

"Here?"

She stared at him, recognizing the surprise in his tone.

"Surely. Why not?" she asked.

"No reason at all, except—it's a queer place for business."

"Is any place a queer place for business?" she retorted. "It seems to me, from what I hear, that nine-tenths of business is transacted away from offices. In clubs, restaurants——"

"What husbands tell wives!" He laughed.

"No; I think it's true. Of course, woolens aren't sold in clubs, or groceries; still, Jimmy says that Miss Holben's companion is the famous gambler, Frankie Landers."

"'Famous?'"

"I suppose you'd say, 'notorious.' Well, there isn't much difference—in New York. A famous New Yorker is one who gets his picture in the newspapers regularly. And Landers surely does that. What sort of man is he? Bring him over to me, will you?"

He stared at her.

"But the man is——"

"Notorious, yes. That's why I want to meet

him. I'd like to meet, too, a girl who can make Jimmy rave. Bring her, too, won't you?"

He colored.

"Why, of course, if you wish——"

"I do wish," she told him calmly.

"Very well."

He rose stiffly and left the little box.

"Go away," said Jimmy, as Baird approached. "Can't you see that I'm making an impression?"

"Miss Elsing wants to know if you won't join her," said Baird.

"Surest thing—won't we, Miss Holben?" agreed Ladd.

"Delighted, I'm sure!" said the girl.

"She wants to meet Mr. Landers, too. I'll find him," said Baird.

"He's around," said Fannie.

Helplessly, Baird watched them cross the dance-floor; he saw Jimmy wave to Eileen. Who would have dreamed that the tangled threads which involved him with Fannie Holben should have, unraveling, led to Eileen Elsing? He felt his soft shirt-front tighten as he breathed heavily. Somehow, he seemed to read into Fannie Holben's delighted acceptance of the invitation a threat aimed at himself. How much did she know? And how much had she told Landers?

But Landers had unconsciously given Baird information as to the character of the girl. She had told Landers nothing—yet. Subtly she had hinted, doubtless, that a new admirer was prepared to finance

her theatrical ambitions, and—let Landers guess that Baird might be the "angel."

As for Landers himself, he knew nothing. Yet he had missed a trunk, or so he claimed. But a man who had lost a fortune would not be so phlegmatic as Landers. Still, the man was a notorious gambler, one who had won and lost huge sums, probably without a change of expression. He went in search of the gambler.

At the head of the stairs that led to the cloakroom and street, he paused. Landers was slowly climbing upward and, leaning toward him, talking earnestly, was Blackmar.

This, then, was the "some one" whom Blackmar had gone to see. Blackmar had spoken quite casually. Yet Eileen had inadvertently let drop the information that Blackmar had had an appointment here to-night. And Eileen had evidently not known that Landers was the person whom Blackmar was to meet.

He reached out and touched the banister. Its support seemed to strengthen him. He stood, awaiting the approach of the two men, fighting to control his nerves. But what an ass he was! What if Blackmar did know Landers? What did that mean to Rodney Baird? Nothing at all.

"Miss Elsing has sent me in search of Mr. Landers," he announced, as the couple reached the head of the stairs.

"Fine stuff! Glad to meet any friend of yours," said Landers heartily.

Baird glanced at Blackmar. His respect for that

gentleman mounted. For there was not the slightest indication that Blackmar objected to the presentation. Yet—he *must* object, thought Baird. A man does not wish the girl whom he is to marry to meet notorious characters. Then he shrugged. This was New York. All that New York demanded, apparently, was that one be interesting. Character seemed not to matter at all.

"Why, surely!" said Blackmar heartily. He looked at Baird. "Landers has been telling me of a bit of ill luck he had."

Baird stiffened.

"Yes?"

"Lost a trunk. Valuable contents."

"He mentioned it to me," said Baird lightly.

"Yes? Stolen from the Tramby. Next room to yours, he says."

"So he told me," said Baird carelessly.

"He's pretty worried about it," said Blackmar.

"He takes it calmly enough," said Baird.

"Oh, that's his way." Landers was ahead of them, threading his way between tables. "But he'd give fifty thousand for its return."

Baird whistled.

"That's a lot of money."

He looked innocently into Blackmar's eyes. The look that he received in return was polite; that was all. Yet, somehow, although the room was, if anything, overheated, Baird felt the least bit chill.

XIV

"CAPTAIN BAIRD, you take me home."

Baird glanced at Blackmar. The dapper man was listening to an allegedly funny story that Landers was telling. If he heard Eileen's command, his face did not show it. Perhaps, though, he did not care. Somehow, Baird resented this interpretation of Blackmar's manner. The girl rose abruptly. Baird also rose. Blackmar leaped to his feet.

"Want to leave, Eileen?" he asked.

"Going to," replied the girl laconically. "Captain Baird is taking me," she said.

"These young guys fresh from war certainly steal the gals, don't they?" remarked Landers. "Looka there!" He pointed to the dance-floor. "There's young Ladd steals my doll, and now young Baird here grabs yours."

"Tired, Eileen?" Blackmar asked, his brows lifting slightly.

"Rather," she said.

She extended her hand to Landers, who bowed over it with a clumsy grace. She nodded coolly to Blackmar, who returned the nod with a similar *sang-froid.* The two men bade Baird casual good-evenings, and he followed Eileen to the door. Neither of them

spoke until after Baird had redeemed his overcoat and they were in a taxi.

Eileen leaned back in the seat. She seemed to relax utterly.

"You *are* tired," said Baird sympathetically.

"A little," she admitted. "Been enjoying yourself?"

"I sat with you," he replied.

She ignored the clumsy compliment.

"You care for this sort of thing?"

"Well—it's a novelty," he said. "How did you like Landers?"

She frowned.

"I wonder why Sam didn't tell me that Landers was the person whom he was to meet."

"Perhaps he thought you might object to meeting him," suggested Baird.

Eileen laughed.

"I've met far more disreputable persons than Landers. And Sam Blackmar has introduced them to me. I wonder——"

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing. Jimmy was in his usual excellent form to-night, wasn't he?"

"Why—er——"

"Extravagant compliments, devoted court——" There was a trace of bitterness, Baird jealously felt, in her tones. "Some day," she went on, "we're going to read a hint in *City Items*." She named a weekly newspaper devoted to the doings of the smart and semismart. "After that, we'll read more than

a hint in the daily papers, and after that a breach-of-promise suit."

Baird laughed.

"Oh, a girl like Miss Holben won't take Jimmy seriously."

"You know her very well?" asked Eileen.

"The merest acquaintance," he told her.

"Let it stop there," she advised curtly. She felt his unuttered surprise. "A girl like that, Captain Baird, is a girl for simple-minded, credulous men to avoid."

"I wouldn't say that Jimmy was credulous," he protested. "He's merely good-natured, filled with the *joie de vivre.* Because he flirts with a girl——"

"Oh, well—Jimmy will take care of himself, I suppose," Eileen interrupted. "But he is running a tremendous risk."

"You seem greatly concerned about Jimmy," said Baird, with sudden stiffness.

"He is an old and dear friend," she replied. "And I count on you, Captain Baird, to pull him out of any difficulty he gets into."

"Thanks," said Baird dryly. "Some chaperon I'll make!"

He felt, in the gloom of the taxi, her eyes upon him. He felt that they were speculative.

"I think you would," she said.

"I am so—er—sedate, staid——"

"Not a bit of it! That is, not painfully so. But you have common sense."

He was grateful now for the taxi's gloom. It hid

his expression as he thought of the suitcase in the storage warehouse.

"I suppose," he said, "that I ought to thank you for them kind words, lady, but I don't. Oddly enough, Miss Elsing, it was not as a grandpapa that I hoped to appeal to you. Queer ideas men get, eh? I sort of hoped that I'd appeal to you as a man of twenty-six, capable of an *affair du cœur* himself, instead of as an old fogy, fit only to chaperon his friend who——"

Her laugh interrupted him. It was a merry laugh.

"Have I offended the poor little petulant man? Well, for that he shall be rewarded. He shall be permitted to come and visit me for ten minutes, and I'll promise to talk of nothing but himself."

Her mockery was soothing. Baby-talk had always annoyed Baird, but this was different. The girl was different. His hand shook as he paid the taxi-man, and the key which Eileen handed him when the elevator deposited them before her door rattled against the lock as he inserted it.

She left him standing in the drawing-room for a moment, and he heard her voice, muffled by the half-closed door, as she spoke to some one in a room off the dining-room. He thought he heard the sound of a kiss.

"My chaperon," she explained, as she reentered the little room. She was smiling. "At least, she is supposed to be my chaperon, but I think that I am hers. The dearest, most whimsical old lady. She's an Early Victorian, Captain Baird, and she

disapproves of me most thoroughly. The next time you come to dinner you shall meet her."

"A relative?" he asked.

Her mouth puckered in distaste.

"Indeed not, Captain Baird! I am abnormal, I think. I—not all my relatives have been—kind. I think that I have a prejudice against the breed. No; Mrs. Kelton is the aunt of an old school-friend. And a most dictatorial person she is, too. She objects to your presence here. It is shocking, she just informed me."

Baird's head felt a bit dizzy. Every drop of blood in him strained toward her. But love—and what he felt for Eileen Elsing certainly resembled love—is different from the lesser affections. If we entertain friendly feelings toward another person, our attitude toward him is kindly. But if we love a person, we must hurt him.

"I suppose she came out last night, when Blackmar called," he said.

He would have surrendered the contents of the suitcase in storage for the opportunity to withdraw the remark the moment it had passed his lips. In his heart he held no doubt of the girl. True, her outlook upon life was not the outlook that he had been brought up to consider the correct and right feminine outlook, but even though Blackmar bought her jewelry and she accepted it, he had no doubt of her. He knew no standards whereby to judge her kind of girl, and so he must not judge. And now, with her lips slowly curling, he felt like a shamed puppy.

"I—I beg pardon," he said. "I did not mean that."

"Did not mean what?" she asked.

"Why—er——" He paused.

"You did not mean," she said icily, "to let me know that you had spied last night."

" 'Spied?' I accidentally saw Mr. Blackmar come in——"

"He did not mention having seen you," she interrupted.

"I don't believe that he did. I beg pardon, Miss Elsing."

"For what?" she demanded.

"Why—for——" Again he was at a loss for words.

"For having thought, I suppose, Captain Baird, that you have been quite magnanimous in your feeling toward me. You saw Mr. Blackmar coming here. But you would think no wrong, because you were too generous to think wrong. Generous!" If lips so lovely could frame a sneer, then it was a sneer that they held now. Her gray eyes were cold, and they held Baird's.

"I'm a beast—a low beast, Miss Elsing, but—you aren't quite fair to me. I—there's no particular insult in a man's being jealous, is there?"

Hard, distrusting, her eyes still held his.

" 'Jealous?' What right have you to be jealous?"

"None at all. No more right than I have to fall in love, Miss Elsing; but, unfortunately, we can't decide these matters for ourselves. The thing happens—that's all."

"You seem quite serious, Captain Baird. You are telling me that you love me?"

He tried to laugh, and failed rather miserably.

"It would seem so, wouldn't it?"

"You have known me," she said slowly, "four days. It is rapid, Captain Baird, to reach the stages of distrust, of jealousy—remarkable." And then her lips wreathed in a smile, and the roguish, provocative look came back to her eyes. "I don't see, Captain Baird, how I can be offended with a man whose offense is due mostly to his warmth of heart."

He stared at her. A moment ago, he had not known whether or not he really loved her. He had known that his heart was leaden at her frown, that he almost ached at her contempt. But now—now he knew. And she had been playing with him! Well—she was in his arms, her slim body crushed against his own, his lips searching feverishly for hers—and finding them.

A full minute he held her. And then, as she made no return to his kiss, as she stood quiescent only, his arms loosened about her. He drew back his head and looked at her. In her eyes he read nothing of love. There was nothing of contempt, either. There was merely a cool finality.

"You're through, Captain Baird?" The matter-of-factness of the question made him drop his arms from about her shoulders. "I think," she said, stepping back from him, "that the ten minutes I promised you are up. To-night, Captain Baird, it will be unnecessary to wait down-stairs. Mr. Blackmar is

not coming. Good-night." Her face was quite expressionless.

"I suppose," he said, "that if I tell you that I am sorry——"

Then he turned and left the room.

Westward, to Columbus Circle, he walked, and then turned into the park. On this winter night, it should be lonely, and loneliness was what he needed. What a fool he had been! If he had bided his time, played a waiting game! Because a girl was decent to him, had condoned his pettiness in her own bigness, he had assumed that she loved him. Well, she certainly must despise him now.

He came out of the park at Fifth Avenue and moved south toward Derriby's. As he walked, he reviewed the whole evening.

How complacent Blackmar had seemed! Blackmar's very willingness to let Eileen go home with Baird should have shown him that the millionaire's courtship had progressed beyond the hot-and-cold stage. He was assured of the girl. He had not objected to Baird's escorting her home, because he knew that Eileen belonged to him. Yet he, Rodney Baird, had thought that he could depose Blackmar from his place in the heart—or mind—of the girl in four days! He had assumed, because of a merry glance, that she would not resent his embrace——

But he had other things to think about than his own feelings for a girl, or the feelings of the girl toward him. Blackmar had said that Landers would pay fifty thousand for the return of a trunk.

Landers had talked of the trunk to Baird. Fan-

nie Holben had hinted— He had been on pins and needles when, with Blackmar, he had rejoined Eileen at her table. Yet, because no more had been said by Blackmar, because Landers had paid no more attention to him, he had managed to dismiss the hints from his mind.

What sort of fool's paradise was he building for himself? With exposure—jail, even—apparently close at hand, he was the silly sort who could think only of a girl's eyes, of her hair, of her dimpled shoulders.

Yet to-night, for the first time, open danger threatened. Fannie Holben had been a markswoman shooting in the dark; but Blackmar— What were Blackmar's relations with Landers? And why didn't Landers— It might be very true that Landers disdained the aid of the police ordinarily, but a sum larger than two hundred thousand dollars— There was an extremely black person in the woodpile somewhere.

He put Eileen from his thoughts. The fact that he had injured himself with a girl was not, after all, paramount just now. And yet, when he entered his apartment at Derriby's, in time to answer the telephone, he was thrilled, forgot all about the Holben girl, about Landers, about Blackmar when Eileen spoke to him.

"Perhaps," she said, "I'm a bit cruel to you, Captain Baird. Anyway, I'm asking you to come to tea to-morrow afternoon."

He stammered something in response. He heard her laugh; then he hung up the receiver and turned

to the door upon which a knock sounded, his heart throbbing, his eyes moist with sudden reaction. A second knock sounded on the door. He opened it, and almost sighed with relief as he met the grinning face of Jimmy Ladd. He had expected Blackmar—or Frankie Landers.

XV

HELLO, Jimmy!" Baird proffered his hand.

"Why should I?" demanded Ladd, looking down at the outstretched member. His grin took the tang out of his question.

The hand dropped to Baird's side. He stared, puzzled, at his visitor as Jimmy walked to an easy chair and sat down.

"Roddy me buck," said Ladd, "I wouldn't be curious James for all the world and the kaiser's ear, but —isn't Derriby's a bachelor establishment?"

"Supposed to be," answered Baird.

"Ye-ah, I thought so. So you're running two ménages, eh?"

Baird lighted a cigarette. His fingers shook a trifle.

" 'Two ménages?' How did you get this way, Jimmy?"

"Jealousy," declared Jimmy. "I saw that snappy li'l doll a couple of hours too late, it seems to me." He accepted a cigarette from Baird's case. "Rod, when you birds from the provinces *do* start, you make a bred-in-the-bone New Yorker look as speedy as a Percheron."

Baird sat down.

"I suppose that I must thank you for the compli-

ment, Jimmy, but I swear I don't know what it's all about."

Jimmy laughed.

"He doesn't know what it's all about, bless his unsophisticated young heart! He's backing a peppy little girl in her new show, but he doesn't know why. Roddy, I'm a shrewd investor, I am. I'll take that show off your hands at a profit."

"I'm not backing anyone in a show, Jimmy," said Baird.

"Galahad stuff! I get you, Rod. Yet, says I, unwilling to hurl the lie into the teeth of my pal, the lady says you are."

"The lady is mistaken," responded Baird.

Ladd sat bolt upright.

"So I guessed, Rod. But I wanted to hear you say so." He eyed his friend speculatively. "You know, old fellow, I've rather gathered that Eileen has—well—Eileen is the world's best. It wouldn't be playing it on the level with Eileen—and, none of my business, of course, and I offer a million apologies for the butting-in, but whoever gets Eileen is going to go to her clean."

"Galahad stuff!" commented Baird.

"Uh-huh," Ladd nodded. "I feel that way about Eileen. I'm a fool, and I know it. I mean as much to her as yesterday's menu-card at a table d'hôte, but——"

"All of which is highly creditable, Jimmy, but—I thought that Blackmar was——"

"Maybe he is. It looks that way. It *did* look that way. But a man never can tell."

"I suppose," said Baird dryly, "that Blackmar brings you his report from Sunday-school every Monday morning, and——"

Jimmy's eyes narrowed.

"Go ahead—kid me. It's all right, Roddy me buck. Blackmar's no scented saint, and I'm the little boy that knows it. But since he's been chumming with Eileen, I happen to know that he's playing it extremely straight. I'm not a fool, Rod. When I said that a man would have to go to Eileen clean, I didn't mean—oh, you know what I mean. Anyway, I came to warn, not criticize. Keep away from your charming little siren, Miss Holben. She's strong medicine for little boys from the provinces. Glad you aren't involved there."

"Just what did she say?" asked Baird. He hid the nervousness that still possessed him under the cover of searching for a match.

"Here." Ladd offered his match-box. "Well, to be just to the lady, she did not say anything definite. But I left her with the quite clear understanding that you were backing a show in which she was to play a leading part. And so—she's friendly with Landers, of course. Don't happen to know anything about him, do you?"

"Except that he's a notorious gambler," said Baird.

"Huh! He's a whole lot more than that. He's been mixed up in a lot of political deals that, if the inside were known, would probably land him in a health resort up the Hudson. I'm surprised that Sam Blackmar meets him openly."

"Is Blackmar in politics?" asked Baird.

"W-e-ll, I'd hardly say that. But Sam has—well, I've heard talk about certain traction deals. But you hear a lot in this town. As far as I know, Blackmar is as honest as anyone else. Anyway, one thing is certain; they'll never catch him. Sam knows the law—and respects it." He yawned frankly. "A rumless evening passes slowly, doesn't it, old top? I'm going to bed. Some diggings you have here."

"I like them," said Baird.

"And I'm glad that you haven't another little home. Oh, well, girls will be girls, I suppose, and it's quite fashionable to have a backer these days. But why should she pick on you?"

"Heaven knows! It would seem more natural to claim Landers as her angel," said Baird.

"Sure would! Only—well, by-by. Drop around to-morrow afternoon?"

"Engagement. Sorry."

"Eileen? Not that it's any of my darned business, but you know me."

"You guessed it," admitted Baird.

Ladd frowned.

"Hm. Well, the race is often to the swift, even if not always. But Sam's got a whale of a bank-roll."

"Maybe Miss Elsing isn't as fond of money as you assume, Jimmy."

There was the hint of rebuke in Baird's voice, and Ladd got it.

"Don't fool yourself, Rod! Eileen is the best in the world, but—she's out for money."

"Well, with your partnership in your father's firm——"

Ladd shrugged.

"She's going to love the man she marries, just the same. At least, she's going to respect him a whole lot, and—Eileen doesn't respect me."

"Why not?" Baird's surprise was patent.

"Eileen has seen me at my Jamiest worst, Rod. Let's forget it. The best of luck, and—keep away from the Holben girl."

For fully two hours after Ladd had gone, Baird sat in his arm-chair, smoking cigarette after cigarette. Jimmy Ladd had always been an extremely frank young person, but to-night Baird was quite certain that he had been purposely ambiguous. How much had Fannie Holben told him?

His last words had been a warning to keep away from Fannie. That warning was certainly open to two meanings: the first, that intimacy with the girl was not fair to Eileen and would be resented by Jimmy; the second, that the girl was dangerous.

His mind reverted suddenly again to Eileen. After all, he had not irrevocably offended. Having been forgiven—and an invitation to tea to-morrow was tantamount to pardon—he was entitled to assume that there might be some basis for Jimmy Ladd's hopeful view of his relations toward Eileen.

And he *did* love her! She was— How much did a kiss mean to her, anyway? How many kisses had Blackmar received in payment for his gifts to her? Was her chaperon— He rose and shook himself,

as though to rid himself of the evil thoughts that crowded his brain. What a pup he was! In one breath, he told himself that he adored the girl, conceived himself as being married to her, and, in the next, he cast doubts upon her that he would not have felt toward Fannie Holben.

And he was a fine person to set up standards for others, he who had— He hesitated. He would not, even in his thoughts, use the word "steal." He preferred the euphemism "borrow," even though he knew it to be a euphemism. But he intended repayment. The salary that he was to receive from Ladd & Company— He thought of Landers, of Blackmar. The first was a notorious gambler; that meant that he was dishonest. There are no successful honest gamblers. The other—well, Jimmy Ladd had intimated certain things to-night. He had said that Blackmar would never be caught.

Were either of these men—and both, he was convinced, were involved in some way in the contents of the suitcase in storage—were either of them any more honest than himself? What was honesty, anyway? Was it capable of rigid definition? It certainly was not. If a man owned the only spring of water on Manhattan Island, would his ownership prevent the other inhabitants from drinking his water? Certainly not. Honesty, then, meant respecting another's right of ownership provided that right worked no injury to oneself. It also meant to respect another's right of ownership if breach of that right worked injury to the owner. Stealing

the water from the spring would certainly not *injure* the owner.

Well then, using the money that he had found in his room at the Tramby worked injury to no one. Its owner did not advertise; he made no claim. When he did prove his ownership, he'd get his money back, all right. Baird's salary would amply cover anything that he'd taken. And if it didn't cover all that he'd used— Fifty thousand, Blackmar had stated, would be paid by Landers for return of the money. A man could do a lot with fifty thousand. It was quite evident that there'd be no public scandal. For some reason or other, Landers wished no publicity.

But surrender just now meant exposure to Eileen Elsing. Blackmar would tell her. Jimmy Ladd would know. The edifice of prosperity, of place, that he had erected would tumble down. *He'd lose Eileen Elsing!*

The fact that Eileen Elsing was not yet his did not enter into his mind. She had invited him to tea to-morrow. She'd forgiven his offense against her to-night. Girls do not forgive violent kisses unless— Blackmar was a middle-aged fop! He'd give any middle-aged fop such a run for his money. Oh, no; it was completely out of the question even to think of surrendering yet.

Every youth in America with intelligence visualized his future in one word: money. With money, one had opportunity to meet the most desirable women. Suppose that he'd not permitted the illu-

sion as to his own means to gain ground in the mind of Jimmy Ladd? Would Jimmy have invited him to his New Year's party? Well, possibly. But would he have been able to continue the acquaintance begun there with Eileen Elsing? Certainly not. And Eileen Elsing was the most desirable woman in the whole wide world. He felt strong, capable, willing to dare the resorts—whether to the police, or to trickery, or to plain violence—of a score of Landers or Blackmars.

He laughed aloud. Why, Blackmar and Landers were making offers already! Of course—and shrewdness came to him—they might be feinting. They could not be *sure* that he had taken the canvas trunk. Once they were *sure*, they might whistle different tunes. The offer of fifty thousand might be a trick to draw him on. Well, the trick had failed.

It gave him confidence in himself to know that he had met, on the field of tactics, two men like Landers and Blackmar, each a man of mark in his line. He had them guessing. It was, then, extremely silly for him to do any guessing himself.

A man who achieved greatly in this world surely spent little time pondering the consequences of his acts. He decided what acts were necessary to his success, and went ahead and performed them. And big men refused to be bound by little rules. Without doing harm to anyone, he could, by virtue of the possession of a fortune, little of which he would spend and that little replace, make himself a man marked for success.

The rules were for the losers, not for the winners. He was a winner.

The smile that was on his lips when he went to bed lingered there after sleep had come to him.

XVI

THE door-bell rang, and Eileen glanced sharply at the clock. It was not quite three. She frowned slightly. Captain Baird surely should know that this was not the tea-hour.

She opened the door herself, but the smile that she had conjured to her lips vanished immediately as she saw Blackmar. He nodded.

"'Lo, Eileen! Not butting in, am I?"

She stood aside to let him pass. With the air of one doing a usual thing, he hung his hat and coat and stick upon a hook. She walked down the hall to the little drawing-room, and he followed. A gas-log was burning in the grate, and he stood before it, his feet spread wide. He seemed very much the master of the house.

"Well, you don't seem overly enthusiastic, my dear," he said.

She eyed him, her face cold. He seemed a trifle too well-groomed to her to-day. That was odd, too, because he was dressed in perfect taste.

"How much time do you spend dressing yourself, Sam?" she asked.

He frowned.

"Probably less than you do, Eileen, my dear."

"Yet more than the ordinary man."

He smiled.

"I am not an ordinary man, Eileen."

She turned away from him and rearranged some flowers—long-stemmed American Beauties—in a slim vase upon a little table.

"No; I hardly think that you are, Sam." There was something hinting of contempt in her voice.

"Meaning that you wish I were, Eileen?" he asked.

She moved away from the vase; her eyes met his; her expression was indifferent, bored.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything, Sam."

"I thought you did."

She sat down on a divan. It was a fairly wide affair, and Blackmar noticed that she sat exactly in the center.

"It's a fault of yours, Sam—suspiciousness."

"Eh?" His face expressed hurt surprise.

"Oh, you know perfectly well what I mean. I can manage to endure your questions—they're in bad taste—but *snooping*——"

"'Snooping?'" He was too bland; his questioning eyes were too well bred.

"Snooping. You know what it is. Your coming-around this afternoon is snooping. I told you that I would not be at home to-day," she accused.

"You did," he admitted. "But there is some business, Eileen——"

"You could have telephoned. What is the business?" she demanded.

From his pocket he drew a note-book.

"American Carpet," he said, consulting the book,

"has advanced eight points in the past month. I think that it would be advisable for you to sell and invest in bonds that I have investigated. American Carpet pays six per cent., but these bonds are not so subject to the market's fluctuation. You would not be tempted to sell if they dropped a few points, as you would if American——"

"You know that I never look at the stock-reports," she interrupted.

He slapped the little book shut. He thrust it into his pocket.

"All right, then, Eileen. If you will have me come right out with it—Baird is entirely too friendly with you. I thought that if I arrived here before he did, you might not be at home when he did come."

"And why," she asked, "are you so certain that he is to be here to-day?"

"He told me so."

"Yes?"

"I telephoned him. Wanted to see him this afternoon. He said that he had an engagement with you."

"Too bad that you didn't think to offer to make an apology to me for him," she said.

His fingers fumbled with his mustache.

"You aren't attractive when you're sardonic, Eileen," he told her.

"And no one is attractive when he's impertinent," she retorted angrily. "By what right do you assume to dictate——"

He grew conciliatory at once.

"Oh, look here, Eileen. Let's not quarrel over an unimportant little pup that——"

"You mean Captain Baird? He was important enough to win a commission in the army."

He shrugged.

"Oh, I don't mean to insinuate that he's not been a good soldier, and—what do you know about him, Eileen?"

"Beyond that he's a gentleman, well bred, a friend of Jimmy's—what do *you* know about him?"

"Not as much as I intend to," he said. A certain grimness slid into his voice.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing, except—nothing at all, Eileen. Let's forget him."

"Didn't Captain Baird tell you that he had an engagement with me?" she asked.

"What difference does that make? What does he matter?"

"I don't know." She uttered the three words slowly; a meditative look crept into her eyes.

"You don't know?"

"How should I?" She smiled sweetly. "I've only known him since New Year's eve."

"Five days!"

"You're not a bit amusing when you're jealous, Sam," she told him. "You don't mind my telling you that I don't care for it?"

He laughed.

" 'Jealousy' is a rather large word to describe it, Eileen. Let's say that I'm annoyed."

"At what?" she asked.

"Well, for one thing, at his taking you home last night."

"I was tired of staying there. I didn't particularly care for your friends."

"Baird's friends as much as mine!" he snapped. "Besides, I was seeing Landers on a matter of business."

"What sort of business, Sam?"

His eyes met hers swiftly, then dropped away.

"Oh, it's too long a matter to explain—if you don't mind."

"I don't," she said coolly. "Go on. You were objecting to the fact that Captain Baird took me home. Why didn't you offer to do so yourself, then?"

"You seemed to have made your decision, Eileen, and—I thought nothing of it. But to-day, when I learned that he was coming here for tea— He dined here Friday night— It's all right, Eileen, but—drop him for a while, will you?"

"Why for a while, Sam?"

"Oh, because—" He hesitated.

"You mean that you know something discreditable to him."

"It may possibly amount to that."

"I don't believe you!" she blazed.

"Eh?"

"I don't believe you." She stared at him combatively. "If you know anything definite about Captain Baird——"

"At least," he defended himself, "I'm a friend of

yours of several years' standing. If I ask you to see little of Baird——"

"Years have nothing to do with friendship," she declared. "Captain Baird is a friend of mine, too."

He sneered.

"He's a friend of Jimmy Ladd, too. The gentleman seems to have a talent that way. Confidence men have the same thing."

She shook her head slowly.

"At times, Sam, I think that you are a very little man."

He bowed.

"I thank you, my dear. Nevertheless, please heed the little man's request. Telephone Baird and——"

"Impossible."

"I ask very little of you, Eileen."

"Why should you ask *anything?*"

His self-possession was deserting him; his face was red.

"Certainly our relation to one another gives me certain rights," he said.

"'Our relation?'" She was charmingly bewildered.

"Oh, quit posing, Eileen! You don't fool me for a minute. You know perfectly well that you intend to marry me, and—why annoy me about a conceited young ass who——"

"Kisses delightfully, and becomes most winningly flustered and apologetic afterward."

His eyes, ordinarily bland, unrevealing of self, glinted.

"It's reached that stage, eh?" She nodded. "If

I did such a thing—" He took a step toward her. She smiled at him.

"But you wouldn't, Sam. I don't think the caveman part would suit you at all."

"Of course not. Certainly not!" He retreated a step toward the fireplace. "Oh, well, if the circumstances are as you say, why—er—I won't be staying, Eileen."

She was infinitely sweet.

"I thought not—when you understood, Sam."

"I understand—quite. Thank you. I'd advise you not to plan on marrying him, Eileen. Really."

"For my own good? All that sort of thing? I understand, Sam."

"Perhaps you don't—fully."

He moved stiffly toward the hall, then turned suddenly. His face had lost its look of anger, was appealing.

"Oh, Eileen, don't——"

"What right have you to advise me, to—even threaten me—to insinuate?" She was downright angry now.

"You have permitted me to pay you attention," he protested.

"But that wouldn't make people think us engaged if it weren't for your—air of proprietorship. I don't like it. I'm too complaisant. I've liked you; I *do* like you, but—you ask me to go to a place like the Maison d'Or, saying that you want to meet some one there. I go with you. And then you permit another man to take me home."

"You asked him to take you."

"Why should you permit me to ask him?" she blazed.

"Oh, come, Eileen; isn't that stretching things? One moment you tell me that I'm not the caveman type, and the next you are angry because I don't play the part."

"Well, you couldn't," she said petulantly. Then, suddenly, she smiled. "I'm a funny girl, Sam."

"You're a most adorable girl!"

"Really? You think so? Oh, I wish that I were; but—oh, well, what's the use?"

"Of what?"

"Of crying for the moon."

"Does the moon have any name that I know?"

"I don't know," she replied.

"Not—Baird?"

She shrugged.

"Sam, I don't know."

"Yet—if you married me—I'm sure that you would."

She looked at him through half-closed lids.

"I wonder. So many men—I imagine all men—say that."

"And while you wonder, I'm losing—much."

"I'm not sure. I might not make a pleasant wife, Sam."

"I will wager my happiness that you will."

"A great stake. It's not like losing in the market, Sam. One can make another fortune, but find another happiness——"

"And I can't persuade you to marry me to-morrow?"

She smiled adorably.

"Are you trying to?"

"I will."

She shook her head.

"No use, Sam—yet."

"I wonder if it will ever be of any use."

She had been leaning back on the divan. Now, suddenly, she sat bolt upright.

"Well, if it isn't, Sam, I'll return all your presents, and——"

"Eileen!"

"Sorry; didn't mean to hurt you, but—I shouldn't have taken them in the first place. Sam, behold a young lady who doesn't know what she wants!"

He smiled.

"Perhaps she'll find out."

"Perhaps. Run along now."

He accepted his dismissal with a shrug. She followed him into the hall. As he put his hand upon the door-knob, she spoke.

"Sorry if I've been a mean thing, Sam, but—you brought it on yourself. And—do you really *know* anything against Captain Baird?"

"I've told you all that I care to just now, Eileen. I wish that you'd not see him."

Temper flared again in her.

"I think that you're just jealous and petty, Sam. I *will* see him!"

She walked slowly back into her drawing-room and sat down before the fire. Whatever else Blackmar's faults were, jealousy had never been among

them before. And, she admitted to herself with a reminiscent smile, he'd had cause enough in the past. She wondered just what his insinuations against Baird meant. She felt a queer tightness about her heart as her mind dwelt on his vague accusations. Could it be possible that she had really, in five days, begun to care for a man about whom she knew nothing? Absurd! Yet her heart leaped as the bell rang promptly at four.

XVII

THE rooms at Derriby's were more attractive Sunday morning than at any time on Saturday. Baird awoke late. A pressure on an electric bell brought Grannan, from whom he learned that the hour was noon. It was luxurious, lying here in bed, idly watching the valet lay out underwear, hearing the water tumbling in the tub.

There were no limits to the distinction which wealth conferred on whatever was brought within its range, Baird decided, as, twenty minutes later, bathed and shaved, with the morning paper in his hand, he sat down before the breakfast that Grannan had laid on a table in the living-room beside the window.

How delightful life could be, if one lived it properly! And it was impossible to live it properly without money. Well—he had the money.

The morning paper held him for fully an hour after he had finished his breakfast. The world was passing through its most critical hours, more critical even than the great war which had terminated only a couple of months ago. He "caught up" with the news of the past few days, and then spent a pleasant half-hour with his nose close to the window, looking at the people on Fifth Avenue.

The mild winter had brought the people out. It might have been a Sunday near Easter. It was a wonderful thing not merely to be in New York but to be on New York's most fashionable thoroughfare. And to have a tea-engagement with the most alluring woman in the world—

The telephone brought him from contemplation of Eileen's charms. It was Blackmar. Baird felt himself shaking.

"Could I see you this afternoon, Captain Baird?" asked Blackmar.

"What time?" asked Baird.

"Oh, around four."

"Sorry. I have a tea-engagement."

"Oh! Be back at five?" asked Blackmar.

"I couldn't say. What was it you wished?"

"Thought that I might interest you in a little matter; but it can wait. Having tea with Miss Elsing?"

"Yes." Baird's voice was cold.

"Fortunate man!" Blackmar's laugh was quite cordial. "Well, I'll look you up early in the week."

Baird walked slowly to the mirror after he had hung up. Last night, Blackmar had hinted—but it might have had nothing to do with the trunk that Landers claimed to have lost. It might simply be that Blackmar was really less complaisant than he had seemed last night. It was rather bald, the way he had asked if Baird was to see Eileen to-day. Maybe the man was jealous. That Blackmar had some business with Baird didn't ring quite true. But why not? Was he not the intimate of Jimmy

Ladd? Was he not to enter Jimmy's employ tomorrow? Hadn't he, Baird, been too ready to take alarm? Miss Holben had undoubtedly kept her mouth rather tightly closed. Landers and Blackmar knew little; they might suspect—probably they didn't even suspect. His own alarmed imagination made him read suspicion in every casual remark. Undoubtedly, Blackmar was either jealous, and wished to learn what foundation he had for his jealousy, or else he genuinely had some business opportunity for Baird.

But Blackmar was, at least, crude, if jealousy had inspired his telephone-call. Baird's lips were still curled, a while later, as he carefully adjusted his tie. He thought, were positions reversed, that he would have more dignity than Blackmar had shown. Now that he thought it over, perhaps Blackmar's laugh wasn't so very cordial when he had exclaimed, "Fortunate man!"

And Eileen's first words, as he entered her apartment, made him believe that he had diagnosed the cause of the telephone-call.

"Captain Baird, do you *always* involve the girls whom you meet in troublesome cross-examinations?"

Reluctantly he surrendered the hand that she had extended to him, and put his hat and overcoat upon the stand.

"I'm not good at riddles," he said. "Who's been cross-examined by whom?"

"Eileen Elsing by Samuel Blackmar."

"Eh?" They were in the drawing-room now. "Why should he——"

"In five days, you have made the imperturbable Sam jealous," she said. "What on earth will you do in five weeks?"

"Marry you, I hope," he said.

"You don't happen to have brought a ring with you?" She smiled.

"Would you wear it?" he asked eagerly.

"I'd try it on. That's the least I could do, isn't it?"

"I'll bring one to-morrow!" he exclaimed.

"Please don't." She laughed. "You tempt me, Captain Baird, and—I don't wish to be tempted."

"You prefer to do the tempting."

Her eyes mocked him.

"Don't I do it rather well?"

He met her spirit of raillery.

"Too well; it smacks of rehearsal."

She frowned.

"I'm not sure that I like that remark."

"It is withdrawn, lady," he said. "It is unsaid."

"It is unheard, also." She sat down on the divan. He stood before the fire, as Blackmar had done a little while ago. She could not help comparing the two men. Baird was infinitely better to look upon than the man who had stood there earlier in the afternoon.

"Why did Mr. Blackmar cross-examine you?" he asked.

"I've told you. I wonder if I'm wise in telling you. You will think me vain—or a trouble-maker."

"Neither," he assured her. "But—what did Blackmar want to know?"

"Who and what you were."

"A large order. Does anyone know who and what anyone else is?"

"A philosopher! And impetuous, too. I didn't think the two could be combined."

He shrugged with an affectation of conceit.

"I have my talents, Miss Elsing."

"You don't seem to resent Sam's interest."

"I'm too much flattered. And that you should repeat it to me——"

The entrance of the maid with tea and tiny sandwiches of lettuce and bread and butter cut extremely thin interrupted his speech. He watched her as she poured, admiring the firm flesh of her forearm, the round wrist, and the well-shaped hand.

"You were remarking," she said, upon the maid's departure, "that I flattered you. I don't mean to, Captain Baird. But—the conventional annoys me. And the unconventional annoys men. Yet I have the better reason."

"Conceded," he said.

She shook her head impatiently.

"That's gallantry. You really don't know what I'm talking about, do you?"

He grinned.

"I'm afraid that I don't."

"Yet you concede that I am right. That's the whole trouble with marriage, Captain Baird. A man courts a girl. He presents his best side. Whatever she says, no matter how silly, he listens to as though it were inspired. As for the girl, she pretends to a sugariness that she hasn't. Both are

deceived; both wake up. When I marry, Captain Baird, there will be no divorce. I mean to know something about my husband before he is my husband." She drank her tea, looking at him over the edge of her cup. "It is a most unmaidenly thing, if we must believe our grandmothers and certain novelists, for a girl to admit to one man that another man wishes to marry her. Yet that is the very thing she ought to tell him. Not for the purpose of piquing him, of spurring him on to an avowal, but because he ought to know it. Especially if jealousy has been aroused. A woman can work tremendous harm by arousing jealousy. But if she tells the man concerned— Mr. Blackmar wanted to see you to-day."

"Yes. I don't know why. Unless it was to find out if I were coming here."

She looked thoughtful.

"I suppose so. I was extremely angry with you last night." He tried to look abashed. "Don't profess too much regret, Captain. It wouldn't be tactful. After all—present your case."

He stared at her.

"My 'case?' " he echoed.

She nodded.

"Sam Blackmar is worth eight millions, more or less. It will be more, never less. Sam is that kind. In his own way, he adores me. I don't say that it is exactly the way I wish to be adored, but—it isn't a bad way. He's forty-five, has an excellent business and social standing. What do you offer, Captain Baird?" He gasped. "I surprise you, eh?" She

laughed, but her tone was very businesslike. "Yet, if Sam Blackmar tried to get you to enter business with him, you'd not hesitate to ask him what he had to offer. You'd be most meticulous. But I'm a girl. You're asking me—I take you seriously—to marry you. Your character—one can guess only at that. I have to guess at Sam Blackmar's, though I've known him several years. But your other assets——"

"I'm not a millionaire," Baird said resentfully. "But I would be able, I think, to do for you——"

"In the style to which I have been accustomed?" She chuckled. "You see, I have to be my own father and question the young men, Captain. The woman who marries with her heart alone is a fool. And most men pretend to want fools for wives. But I refuse to yield to their pretenses." She looked at him carefully. "You're not bad-looking, you know. You dance well; you're only twenty-six——"

"Is it so impertinent, so presumptuous, my falling in love with you, that you must make fun of me?" he demanded, flushing.

Her eyes widened.

"Making fun of you? My dear Captain Baird, I was never so serious in my life. But you're like all men. If a woman is honest, she's incredible. Blame your own impetuosity for my frankness. If you were a little less hasty, I would not need to shock your ideal of maidenly silliness, of girlish recklessness concerning the most important thing in a woman's life—her marriage. But—do you suppose that I told you of Sam Blackmar's jealousy merely to

flatter you?" She shook her head. "Because you may be interfering with a very important matter; you may be causing me to refuse a remarkable opportunity. I want to know what you have to offer in exchange." She paused.

Slowly he spoke.

"You're quite the strangest girl in the world."

"Of course. I put my thoughts into words. But why not? Do you"—eyes that were provocative last night were alluring now—"love me any the less for it?" He started forward from his chair. Her hands made a motion as though to fend him away. "That wouldn't help me to find my own decision. You'd find it for me, and—I'm the least bit afraid of you."

He sank back into his chair. The telephone-bell rang before he could speak. Eileen went into the next room. He could not hear what she said, but when she came back, her face was very white.

"My uncle," she said. "A stroke, my cousin tells me. Will you excuse——"

"Certainly," he told her. "Can I take you—get a taxi?"

She shook her head.

"They're sending a car for me."

"I hope it's nothing serious—" He said no more. From her eyes he knew that she feared. She did not go to the door with him. He let himself out.

But he could not dwell upon the illness of her uncle, who, if Jimmy Ladd had been correct, had not been any too kind to her. He dwelt on the amazing directness of the girl. And it did not de-

tract from her charm, either. Well—because she was right! After all, if a man is trying to change the whole course of a girl's life, he ought to be willing that she should exercise a certain caution concerning her relation toward him.

His lips straightened. Blackmar was jealous. That meant that any suspicions Blackmar had would be told to Eileen the moment that he considered his jealousy founded on cause. Which meant, further, that Blackmar must *never* know that his suspicions were just. Oh, well—and his shoulders straightened—it would be possible to return the money to Landers, or whoever owned it, without the owner knowing who returned it. In the meantime, it would be as well to meet Blackmar soon, to lull his suspicions.

But when he reached his rooms at Derriby's, he wondered whether it would be easy to lull those suspicions. Some one had been in his rooms—not any of the employees of the building, inquiry ascertained for him. But some one who was interested, not in theft of his belongings—none of his trifling jewelry, none of his money was disturbed. But certain letters had been read. He knew that, because they were not in their envelopes, as they had been when he had gone out. Also, other papers had been taken from his portfolio. They had been replaced, but hastily.

He began to understand why Blackmar had asked where he was going. Blackmar wanted time in which to work. Or to let his accomplices work.

Well, they hadn't found anything—not a thing that would incriminate. They would know, though,

that he had received only a trifling sum for his Linestream property. Well, he might have a hundred other sources of income for all they knew—or could *prove*.

But he was glad that the money that he had taken from the canvas trunk was in storage. If he had delayed in getting that out of the way! But he hadn't. Why, then, shiver with apprehension?

He'd keep an eye on Grannan. The man seemed to be altogether too curious in a deferential, obsequious manner. How simple for Blackmar or Landers to have bribed the body-servant! That Grannan was supposed to be off for the afternoon meant nothing. He was extremely glad that he had not deposited all the money in the bank. For Grannan, or whoever had searched his effects, would have read the entry in the bank-book. But the questions born of his own fears were still unanswered when, after dinner in his own rooms, he finally went to sleep.

A sharp report brought him upright in his bed. For a moment, until the unmuffled curses of the unfortunate taximan in the avenue below floated through the open window and told him what had happened, he thought himself in France again. Then he lay back and smiled. But there was no humor in the smile; it was quizzical, self-directed.

Life was something like an automobile tire. Smoothly one sailed along, and then—the merest tack of circumstance got in the way and—a blow-out!

He switched on the electric lamp near the head

of the bed. Cigarettes and matches were upon a stand close by. He reached out, and, a moment later, was smoking.

The simile of the automobile tire amused him. What bit of glass could wreck his smooth ride now? Blackmar? Fannie Holben? Landers?

He blew a ring of smoke and watched it lose its perfect form. Why didn't one or all of those three persons come out in the open? Two hundred thousand dollars was a *fortune.* Its rightful claimant should be moving every power to regain it.

Its *rightful* claimant! The word intrigued him. *Rightful!* Possession was nine points of law, and he held those nine points. What sort of person would he be to consider surrendering those nine points to anyone who could not prove a perfect title? And what sort of person would he be to worry until the owner of that clear title appeared?

People knew about that money—yes. Landers, Blackmar, and Fannie Holben. But knowledge meant nothing. Why didn't they *demand* it? Because, obviously, it wasn't theirs. Then whose was it? How could he, Baird, do any harm to that owner by mere sequestration of the money?

That was all it amounted to—sequestration. But, inasmuch as there was no hue and cry raised about the money just now, it behooved him to wait until the owner openly declared himself.

Indeed, by seeking out the person who had placed it in his room at the Tramby, he might do evil. There is a cause for all mysterious happenings. And frequently the cause is evil. Something furtively

evil lay behind the failure of the money's owner to come out into the public prints with the story of his loss. It could easily be argued that, by biding his time, Baird was doing good.

So untold millions have comforted themselves. "I mean no harm," they say, as they take the first step. But wrong is like gravity. Eternally it pulls, and the pull is ever downward.

Man does not stand alone. Cast upon a desert island he exists, if he does, because of the millions of men who have lived before him, who have transmitted to him resourcefulness.

And no event stands alone. Other events lead up to it; it, in turn, leads up to still other things. No action can be final in itself. It leads to other actions. But of this Baird was not thinking as he turned out the light. He had no wish to read the future. The assurance of youth was his; he could meet the future when it arrived.

XVIII

JAMES McPHERSON LADD, senior, had been born "set" in his ways. Broader than most "set" men, he did not sneer at and condemn the new style of business building. But he would not move the offices that had been his father's; no piled millions could tempt him to tear down the three-story Ladd Building and in its place erect an eighteen-story edifice that the blind would think was another tribute to money-lust, but the seeing would know was another expression of the striving spirit of America, the spirit that ever reaches, and deems no glory set too high to be seized for her great diadem.

Sky-scrapers were all very well. The old gentleman, on hearing well-born foreigners exclaim over the amazing beauty of Manhattan's sky-line, on being told that the Woolworth Building was one of the world's most beautiful structures, had reluctantly come to the sane conclusion that "*autres temps, autres mœurs.*"

But, even as he had not yielded to the passion for scroll-saw-carved woodwork, so he refused to yield to the modern passion for heaping steel and concrete into the air. Men whom he esteemed had suffered no moral or financial deterioration by conducting their affairs in bright, cheery offices set hun-

dreds of feet in the air, but if he would concede the right of other times to other customs, he also wished the concession to the old dog of going along comfortably with his old tricks. He would not learn new ones.

So, one of that generation which took its wealth seriously, he liked gloom. The modern generation, knowing that wealth is not amassed by painful building upon a firm foundation but depends upon one's ability to think a bit faster than one's neighbor, makes no ritual of wealth, no fetish of it. Perhaps it esteems it more highly—but for the things it brings, not for itself alone. Sanity grows in every age.

To Baird, brought up in a New England city, where the law limits the height of the buildings, where reverence for things as they were is more prevalent than in New York, the Ladd Building seemed eminently fitting as the home of the Ladd interests.

"Gloomy old dump, eh, Rod?" said Jimmy, on Monday morning. "One of the first things I'm going to fail in will be my endeavor to persuade the governor to move."

"Why?" demanded Baird.

Jimmy shrugged.

"The kale, kid. This property is worth four millions. Its rental represents three per cent. on half a million. You can't make people inhabit gloomy old rooms like these if they've the money to get more modern offices. Spend a few millions more in

putting up a real office-building here, and the income rises, old top."

"And the income tax," smiled Baird.

Jimmy's answering smile was wry.

Baird's thoughts turned inward. Suppose, at the end of the year, when he made out his income tax, he wanted to be strictly honest? But that was rot. He'd have repaid long since the money that he was using to-day. Nevertheless, it made an interesting little problem.

He permitted Jimmy to lead him through the offices. Ladd & Company occupied the entire first floor of the building. Yet there were not, after all, many employees. The business which Ladd, senior, headed required not so very many workers, it appeared. For the old gentleman dealt in money. It takes a strong man to carry a hod of bricks fifty feet, bricks worth perhaps, even in these days of inflated values, a couple of dollars. But the merest boy can carry fifty miles, if need be, pieces of paper that weigh a fraction of an ounce but that are worth, perhaps, a couple of million dollars. Money is the most tangible thing in the world; it is also the most intangible.

Ladd & Company were investment bankers, whatever that meant. For, apparently, it meant anything and everything.

"It's like this," said Jimmy, in his interest at explanation permitting a two-cent cigarette to burn a black-walnut table that had cost two hundred dollars once, but was worth to-day an easy twenty-five hundred: "My grandfather broke away from the old

tradition of Ladd & Company. That tradition was to send your money a long way off. My ancestors shot their kale to China, to the East Indies. But grandpop soaked a bunch of it in this country. We became less an importing firm and more an investing firm. Then came along dad. He was the real financial genius of the line—until myself." He chuckled. "Well, dad discovered that, while there was money in investing your own dough, there was a lot more in investing other people's. So—we're private bankers. No checking-accounts against us, though. Like family lawyers, almost. Somebody—an estate, most likely—has an extra million. They know that we know where to put it. We do. If they want their money in a fluid form, they get four per cent. If they want it invested, they get eight and ten and twelve."

Baird whistled.

"I didn't know that anything safe paid such a rate of return."

Jimmy grinned.

"Get you mortgages on the best farm-land in this country at eight per cent., if you want. Safe and good. Oh, yes; money will bring a good return now and any old time. But that's merely one line. We finance propositions that are conservative—street-railroads, water-plants—the like of that."

"Promotion," Baird nodded sagely.

But Jimmy shook his head.

"Hardly that. Nothing wild. Nothing that isn't all settled. Why take any risk? Established things will pay a big-enough return. A new holding com-

pany to take over a couple of going concerns—Oh, well, you'll get it all soon enough."

"I hope so," said Baird dubiously.

Jimmy laughed encouragingly.

"No chance of failure for you, Rod! You aren't the failing kind."

Baird looked about him. They were in a sort of board-room, a room where directors would be apt to meet. In fact, that was exactly what the room was for. Ladd & Company, Jimmy told him, represented thousands of stockholders in hundreds of corporations. Jimmy himself would, in the course of the next few weeks, be chosen director of scores of corporations.

"What am I to do first?" asked Baird.

Jimmy shrugged.

"Oh, just kick around for a few weeks. Get the hang of the way we do things. Then there's a proposition in Toledo, and another in Vincennes, Indiana. Human element. The deal is all right, if the people—— That's your job, Reddy me buck. Meantime, look the place over."

He vanished through the door leading to Ladd, senior's, private office. Baird walked into the room that had been assigned to him, on the glass panel of whose door a painter was already neatly printing the words:

MR. BAIRD

It was a dream, an amazing, kaleidoscopic dream, in which scene succeeded scene, character succeeded character, event chased event. Donchester, Robbins

& Robbins, the training-camp, the Atlantic, France, the front, the Atlantic, demobilization, the Tramby, the Chummy Club, Eileen Elsing, the Central, the canvas trunk, Derriby's, Blackmar, Fannie Holben, Frankie Landers, Ladd, senior, Ladd & Company, his private office, "Mr. Baird" on the glass—

He shook himself slightly. Here he was, at a salary of twenty-four thousand a year, high in the favor of both partners in the concern, an amazing financial career stretching out before him, a social career, he supposed, too, and a girl— And on how sharp a pinnacle he perched! It might transfix him at any moment, leaving him wounded, gasping, a pitiable object for the world to jibe at, an example that one must not leave one's own class save by the routine way of inheriting or earning one's money— Not by a blamed sight!

Jimmy Ladd was so excited as he burst into the room that he did not notice the scowl on his friend's face.

"Well, Rod, the luck sometimes takes a long time to turn, but—just got an advance tip on Bellew Elsing's will."

"So soon?" asked Baird.

"Well, he's an important—*was* an important old guy. Six millions is regular money, even in this man's town. Tommy Burnham—owns the *Despatch*, you know—got the inside dope from Sminer & Merkle, the Elsing lawyers. Eileen gets a sixth."

Baird's jaw dropped.

"A million?"

"Maybe more. Certainly not much less."

Baird digested this information. A certain alarm last night and the newness of his position to-day had made him take scant interest in the health of Eileen's uncle, though he had been perfunctorily regretful when she had received the telephonic information that the old man had had a stroke.

Like all the rest of the world, he had seen the head-lines in this morning's papers announcing the death of Bellew Elsing. Like a few of those who saw the head-lines, he had read the newspaper account of the dead man's upright life, his success as a merchant, his charities, his civic spirit, and all the rest of it. But it had not entered even into a corner of his brain that Eileen Elsing would share in the dead man's estate.

Hadn't Jimmy Ladd stated that Eileen had broken with her relatives, that the daughters, her cousins, were jealous? And now she had inherited an approximate million. He felt conscious of irritation. By what right did this dead man reach out his stilled hand and cast a shadow over the life of him, Rodney Baird? For, if the girl had a million— Slowly the shadow departed. With a million, Eileen Elsing could pick and choose. Blackmar's wealth suddenly dwindled.

"It's money," Baird said slowly.

"Yea, bo!" agreed Jimmy. "I look for friend Blackmar to take his foot in his hand and look for the door."

"You don't like him?" said Baird.

"I won't like you such an awful lot when you marry Eileen," smiled Jimmy.

"But Blackmar hasn't married her."

"Well, his chances looked good a while ago. But now—nix." He walked up and down the office. "Bless her heart! She deserves it. A game kid, if there ever was one, and—I wonder how cousins Jennie and Mabel are taking the glad news. They've done their darndest to down Eileen, and now——"

"Maybe they'll contest," said Baird.

Jimmy's eyebrows raised.

"You say that as though you hoped that they would."

Baird flushed.

"Well——"

"You're all wrong. Maybe you haven't a million, but—Eileen won't worry. As long as one of the contracting parties has it—— Oh, well, I'm a fine little match-maker, eh? But contest? No chance." He sat down and smoked a cigarette. "Wish to heaven I didn't know them!"

"Why?" Baird was frankly surprised.

"Funeral. I think Bellew Elsing was a trump. He's died, and he left Eileen a million, both of which acts tend to commend themselves to me, but—I didn't like him. And now I'll have to attend the last rites. What savages we are, Rod! Promise me—when I die I want the gang to lift a few—if prohibition isn't the law—say, 'He was a good guy when he had it,' and forget me. Don't you ever let them church me at the finish, and sing songs over me when I can't fight back, and harrow the feelings of my friends and family, will you, boy?"

Baird laughed.

"I promise."

Jimmy threw his cigarette out the window.

"Come on out to luncheon, Rod. I want a drink —forgot I was on the wagon. Oh, well, some food, to take the foretaste of the funeral out of my mouth."

It was a most interesting luncheon. Half a dozen men stopped at the table to shake hands with Jimmy, to be introduced to Baird. Their names were household words in America. Some of them had been born to success; some had achieved it, and others had had it, like Jimmy, thrust upon them. Another score called greetings, waved friendly hands, went through the pantomime, across the room, of drinking young Ladd's health.

It was a new part of New York, something that Baird had not known before. This down-town section was where the money that was spent up-town was made. Baird felt his shoulders squaring. These keen-eyed, clean-featured young fellows, young middle-aged men, young oldsters were to furnish him the competition that he had always secretly dreaded. To-day, he was not afraid of them. In the past, when men like these had come into the offices of Robbins & Robbins, he had been deferential of manner and timid of soul. But to-day it was different. He was no longer alien to them—a jealous bookkeeper, hopeless of ever lining up alongside them—he was *of* them; they treated him with respect, as the confidential associate of James McPherson Ladd, junior. Soon, he prayed, they would treat

him with consideration because of himself alone, not because of any association.

They were finishing their meal and were squabbling amiably for the check when a hard-featured youth stopped by the table.

"Hello, Ladd!" he said effusively.

He was well groomed, had the air of gentility, yet there was something furtive about him. One would have been hard put to define it, to place this furtiveness, but it was there.

"Hello!" said Jimmy coldly.

But the other lingered.

"Got a good thing in oil, Jimmy."

"Not to-day, Cather," said Ladd.

The name made Baird prick up his ears. He eyed the loiterer. Back, over a decade, his memory skipped. He remembered Bob Cather. Cather hadn't consorted with the Bairds of Linestream, but Baird remembered him—and his sister Eleanor. He'd been talking about them to Eileen the other day. Vaguely, through a haze, he remembered the scandal about Cather.

"Don't I know you?" asked Cather. He thrust forward his hand.

Baird took it reluctantly.

"My name is Baird—Rodney Baird."

"Sure—I remember," said Cather. "Linestream high school."

"You knew each other?" demanded Ladd.

"Surest thing in the world! Used to play around together—marbles, tops, all that sort of thing.

Have a little drink, Baird?" Cather was extremely effusive.

"On the wagon, both of us," said Ladd. "Come along, Rod."

Outside, on Broadway, he eyed Baird curiously. "Know that chap well?"

"Not particularly," replied Baird cautiously.

"Good thing. Crooked as a ram's horn. Got into a scrape several years ago. Matter of using some estate money. Father almost went broke squaring him. From bad to worse. Cheap tipster. Fine family, though. Used to play with him, eh?"

"Oh, occasionally," said Baird idly.

Somehow, although Cather was *declassé*, it appeared that a boyhood association conferred something on Baird. It was a peculiar world.

XIX

STRAIN had been Baird's portion for several days, but excitement had lent him strength to endure it. But now, for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, there was no excitement. Blackmar and Landers with their covert threats, Fannie Holben with her quite open ones were strangely silent and remote. And he could not see Eileen Elsing. At least, he supposed that he could not. Of course, he wrote her a proper note of condolence, and, equally of course, received no reply. And Jimmy did not appear at the office on the two days succeeding a summons, as an old family friend, to attend to the management of Bellew Elsing's funeral.

Ladd, senior, was courteous in the extreme, but, apparently, preferred that his son should attend to Baird's instruction in his duties. So Baird was put to the extremity of finding work for himself. He was not able to do this exactly, but he did, all files and records being open to him, gather, by Wednesday afternoon, a fairly comprehensive digest of the far-flung ramifications of the Ladd & Company interests.

In his rooms, he had found no further signs of furtive interest. If Grannan had been subsidized by Blackmar, the man gave no external sign. Cour-

teous, self-effacing, deft, and suave, he was the perfect servant. That, and nothing more.

It was a dull time for Baird. The threat of exposure, which now he began to realize would always be with him, bore on him. He began to wish that Blackmar or Landers or the Holben girl would do something. A combat postponed looms more threateningly than one immediately at hand.

On Wednesday afternoon, Jimmy Ladd telephoned.

"The agony is all over, Rod," he said. "Not coming down to the office to-day, though. Dine with me?"

"Sure thing!"

"All right. I'll call for you at your diggings about seven, eh?"

"Suits me."

"Will was read to-day. Burnham's tip was O. K. Eileen will have about twelve hundred thousand."

"I'm glad for her sake," said Baird perfunctorily.

"Better be glad for your own, boy. Seven it is, then." He hung up.

Baird's eyes rested unseeingly upon the mass of papers before him—papers that had to do with the proposal of certain Vincennes persons with regard to an interurban electric freight-and-passenger railroad.

It was definitely established, then, that Eileen was wealthy. It sort of— Well, if a poor girl has set her mind on a rich marriage, will a fortune in her own right change her ideas? That was the question.

And he couldn't solve it, of course. He wondered when he might decently telephone her. No reason why he should delay very long. It wasn't as though Eileen had been Bellew Elsing's daughter. Of course, having been treated so generously by him, she might feel— He'd 'phone her as soon as he reached his rooms.

But he did not. Grannan, a little more obsequious than usual, met him at his door. There was in the man's manner, despite his obsequiousness, a certain defiance that Baird sensed.

"Excuse me, sir, Mr. Baird, sir, but, I took a great liberty, sir."

"Yes?" Baird had no reason for his belief that Grannan had been instrumental in permitting some one to search his rooms last Sunday. But a bank-teller would have difficulty in explaining why a certain signature aroused his suspicion. There are senses beyond the five that we know.

"Yes, sir." Grannan smoothed his coat lapel. "The young lady was so insistent, sir."

Baird stared at the man. He knew at once what Grannan meant, yet he asked,

"You mean that she's waiting inside for me?"

"Yes, sir; I hope it's all right, sir."

Baird threw open the door to his living-room without answering. Fannie Holben, seated in a chair, looking down upon the teeming avenue, whirled around. Baird carefully shut the door. He locked it.

"What is the big idea?" she demanded. "Never

heard me scream, did you, Mr. Baird? Better unlock it."

He shook his head.

"Just so that no one can come in. Not so that you can't get out, Miss Holben."

She blushed angrily.

"Any time I start playing that sort of game, Mr. Baird—I haven't any angry husband up my sleeve, and you know it."

"I don't know what you have up your sleeve, Miss Holben. But I hope to find out."

He advanced into the room. Carefully he hung up his overcoat, smoothing out the sleeves, rumpled by his hasty discarding of it. He pushed out a dent in his soft hat and put it atop the coat. Then he turned to the girl.

"Let's get down to cases quickly, Miss Holben. Derriby's is, as you may not know, a bachelor establishment."

"I know it. My pocketbook knows it. It felt the strain of the rules just now." She smiled impudently up at him.

"There is a reception-room down-stairs," he informed her.

"I know it. But I wanted this talk private."

"And you get what you want. Suppose that we make it brief and final as well as private, Miss Holben."

She crossed her legs negligently. She had on different shoes from those she had worn in the Tramby. Also, there was newness in her trig brown dress. And the heavy furs above it, thrown open

carelessly, were not only new but expensive. Baird stood silent, staring down upon her.

"Just as you say," she retorted; "I want twenty-five thousand dollars, and I want it to-day."

"A laudable ambition. To want money is perfectly proper. May I ask why you come to me, though?"

"You may," she told him, her teeth clicking over the words. "You've asked before, but this time I'll tell you. On New Year's eve, a trunk was put in your room. It contained one hundred and five thousand dollars. You stole it!"

Brief as the speech was, it left her breathless. Her full bosom rose and dropped heavily.

Well, they were in the open at last! The direct charge had been made. "One hundred and five thousand," she said. He caught himself as he was about to debate the amount. It might be a clumsy trick to win admission from him. And, clumsy as it was, it had almost succeeded.

"I stole it?" He was elated with himself, because his voice was steady, and because he knew that the smile upon his lips would seem perfectly natural to her. In fact, he felt like smiling. Fight held no fears for him; suspense did.

"Oh, *took* it, if you prefer the word, Mr. Baird. And I want mine."

"One hundred and five thousand, you said?"

"A few hundred either way. It doesn't matter. You give me mine, and I'll not quarrel over hundreds."

"And you don't mind telling me where you ac-

quired this interesting misinformation?" he asked gently.

"I picked it up. What difference does it make where I got it, so long as it's *in*formation, not *mis*-information?"

"If it only were," smiled Baird. "But, Miss Holben, if you've banked too heavily on your 'information,' I'm sorry for your disappointment."

"Eh? Don't weep for me yet," she advised him tartly. "Suppose I check up on you, Mr. Baird."

"Delighted. May I smoke?"

She nodded. Abruptly she began her "checking up."

"You were in the Tramby New Year's eve, Mr. Baird. Later, you were at the Central. You borrowed a hundred from Mr. Ladd there. I saw you. You paid him back next day."

"Sure of that?" he asked lightly.

"Jimmy Ladd is an open-throat when a woman's in the game," she said. "Saturday night, dancing with him, I got that out of him."

"And the point it makes?" he asked.

"I'll come to that. Give me time. New Year's day, you went to Donchester. Next day, you sold some property you had there. Get less than two thousand for it, I happen to know."

"Sure of that?" he inquired.

"Bob Cather went to Donchester for me yesterday to make sure. He couldn't get the exact amount, but——"

"Cather?"

She nodded.

"I've seen him a few times since I've been over here. He's one of the old lunch-room crowd. Always bragging about his swell friends. Wants people to think he still belongs, when his very bragging proves that he's out. But he mentioned having met you with Jimmy Ladd. I'd mentioned Ladd's name; that's what brought it up. Well, he told me things about you. Said you were not in his crowd when you were kids. Said that you were pretty hard-up people. Well, I knew where you'd been working in Donchester—Robbins & Robbins—and I sent him to Donchester. He brought back the dope."

"I hope that he didn't charge you too much. You were rather hard up the other day," said Baird politely.

The girl colored again.

"If a girl's going to borrow, she might as well borrow enough to make it worth while. Frankie Landers bought these things. He's been generous. But don't get any wrong idea——"

"Miss Holben, I haven't any ideas about you, except that you've made two mistakes."

"'Two?'" she looked at him blankly.

"Yes. One in thinking that I stole a trunkful of money; the other in thinking that I'd submit to blackmail, even if I had."

"H'm." She eyed him closely. "No mistake about the first, Mr. Baird. About the second—we'll see. Want to hear any more?"

His imitation of an insolent yawn was perfect. She fired immediately.

"Oh, I won't bore you much longer!" she cried. "I've got your number all right. You're here, at Derriby's. You're spending money like a drunken sailor, and—I'm going to Frankie Landers with what I know."

"With the tale that I am stopping here?" Baird laughed. "Did you know that I'm employed by Ladd & Company? That with something under two thousand a man could live a while here at Derriby's?"

"Yes; but he couldn't buy thirty-five-hundred-dollar pins out of that two thousand!" she cried. "Oh, I'm not easily fooled, Mr. Baird. I know what I know. That trunk was put in your room. Frankie Landers is willing to believe that some one else sneaked it out of that room, but—not with you buying diamond pins. I won't believe it's anyone else."

"Quite certain that I'm doing that sort of thing?"

"Jimmy Ladd mentioned it when I admired Miss Elsing's pin," she retorted.

Baird's estimate of Jimmy Ladd was quite unfavorable at the moment. Still, why shouldn't Ladd have mentioned it? Ladd didn't know the thinness, the rottenness of the ice on which Baird skated.

"All the evidence in, Miss Holben?" he asked.

"Isn't it enough?" she demanded. "You haven't any money of your own. You begin to splurge right after a fortune is left in your room. Begin paying debts, buying diamonds——"

Baird laughed.

"I suppose you could tell me how that money happened to be left there."

"I could, but I won't," she snapped. "All I'm interested in is 'mine.' Do I get it?"

He shook his head.

"Sorry. I have such silly prejudices, you know. Blackmail is one of them."

"Theft isn't, though, eh?" she countered.

"Don't know, I'm sure. Never had the opportunity."

She rose abruptly.

"All right; we won't argue it. I'm going to Frankie Landers—now!"

Blazing-eyed, she started past him. A knock sounded on the door.

"Hello, Rod? In?"

It was Jimmy Ladd's voice. The girl, apparently, was more alarmed than was Baird. She pointed silently toward his bedroom door. Her lips moved; whisperingly she said:

"Let me in there. Till he goes."

Baird's brows drew together. Why she should mind being found in his rooms by Jimmy Ladd he couldn't understand. Maidenly modesty was a bit too far-fetched. Nevertheless, her whim coincided with his own desire. He nodded assent. She tiptoed to the bedroom door.

"Right with you, Jimmy!" he called.

He seized his hat and coat and went into the hall. Ladd was leaning against the banister, cheerfully smoking.

"Ready?" he asked. "Any special place you want to dine?"

"Ready and not particular," said Baird.

"Fine!" said Jimmy. "Orlanno's, then."

XX

THROUGH a daze floated the unctuous words of Judge Sminer: "One-sixth to my beloved niece, Eileen Elsing——"

It was incredible! Uncle Bellew had never intimated, by the faintest hint, that she was to share—

She had almost been dozing. Unwilling as were the daughters of Bellew Elsing to let Eileen manage matters, nevertheless they were equally unwilling for Eileen to absent herself. She must be with them every moment, listening to their self-pitying lamentations on their loss.

It had been a distasteful duty, staying by the bereaved family. Especially was it distasteful because, from the moment that the grave physicians had pronounced the old man dead, there had been in the manners of Mabel and Jennie an intimation that Eileen was an interloper.

Yet, when she had endeavored to go home for a while, they had indignantly accused her of being heartless, had sent a servant for clothing and other things, had insisted that Eileen remain. And, although there was no reason why she should attend the reading of the will, Judge Sminer had been quite urgent in his request that she join the rest

of the family in the gloomy dining-room of the Elsing mansion.

And Bellew Elsing had left her one-sixth of his estate! One-half had gone to his widow, and the other half had been equally divided between his two daughters and his niece. It was incredible, but—a fact! For the judge was rereading the clause again.

She lifted her eyes and looked about her. To her great amazement, Mabel and Jennie were smiling at her.

Half an hour later, walking down Fifth Avenue—the Bellew home, on East Seventieth Street, was not too far from her apartment, and she had refused a car—she marveled on the strange thing called human nature.

"I'm delighted," Mabel Elsing had said, and her sister Jennie had echoed her.

"Of course, if papa hadn't done it—— We're hogs, all of us, Eileen. Thank heaven, though, neither Jennie nor I are so porcine that we regret father's doing the right thing. We'd never have done it ourselves, but—you won't have to marry Sam Blackmar, Eileen, and we're *glad!*"

One letter among the little pile of mail that had accumulated at her home during the past three days attracted Eileen. She did not recognize the writing, but she knew whose it was at once. She put it aside and opened the others.

Aside from three or four notes of invitation and a bill, they were formal messages of condolence—save

one. That was from Blackmar. She read it; her eyes narrowed. It, too, expressed sorrow for the loss of her uncle. But it spoke of seeing her soon, and its expression was intimate. It was as though her loss was also his. Ten days ago, she would not have resented this, but just now she did. By what right did he assume so much? Yet he had assumed much in the past and she had not rebuked him. An assumption unopposed becomes a right.

She picked up Baird's note, and suddenly became conscious of the fact that her lips held a smile. She ironed them out, blushing. Captain Baird might be swift, but she preferred to go slow. But—did she? She felt warm all over. The blush that, unbidden, had begun at her cheeks stole down her throat and bosom.

Marriage, up till now, had seemed to her nothing much more than the changing of her name and the opening of a bank-account. Romance had never stirred her. Marriage had seemed the surrendering of a restricted sort of liberty and the acquisition of a more complete freedom. For, certainly, married women were much freer than the single women of her acquaintance.

But marriage for the mere sake of marriage—Until within the past few days, such a marriage had not occurred to her. Marriage was a means to an end. Sometimes the end—as in her own case she guiltily admitted—was monetary; sometimes it had to do with position; she even knew girls who had married to get away from their homes.

But now, with a fortune awaiting her, she read

Baird's letter. It had in it nothing of the possessive quality that had irritated her when she read Blackmar's note. It was extremely formal, quite correct.

Yet she caught herself lifting the paper to her lips. Her blush grew deeper. She tossed the letter from her. She was no schoolgirl surreptitiously devouring a note from the sophomore in the college near by. She was a woman, and womanhood meant common-sense.

Who was this man Baird? After all, she must not forget that Blackmar had intimated strongly that there was something shady about this new pal of Jimmy Ladd's, this new addition to the firm of Ladd & Company.

She was weary, dog-tired, when she went into the dining-room, called thither by Mrs. Kelton.

The little table was heavy with flowers. She sat down opposite her chaperon and summoned a smile to a face grown suddenly wan. It was pleasant to be home again. It was pleasant to have opposite one a person to whom one's word was law, in whose eyes one could be nothing save perfection. She wondered if a husband's eyes would hold as satisfying an expression as that which brightened the glance of Mrs. Kelton.

The dinner was delicious. Eileen made a tremendous effort to eat. But the effort was apparent. Mrs. Kelton, however, was one of those rare individuals who, when they are trying to please some one else, are not trying to please themselves.

It mattered not that she and Myra, the colored maid of all work, had spent most of the day in pre-

paring this dinner. Mrs. Kelton was not the sort who will kill with kindness, and do so with prideful rectitude. She rose with the salad and came round to Eileen.

"You darling little girl!" she crooned. "I should have known that you are all worn out, and— Don't cry, dearest!"

"I—I—m-must," sobbed Eileen. "Uncle Bellew left m-me a m-million dollars, and I th-think C-Captain B-Baird is in l-love with me, and——"

She stopped suddenly. But Mrs. Kelton was a wise old lady who had been in love herself, who had had doubts, self-distrust, dismay, and glowing delight all in the same moment. Gently she led Eileen to her bedroom. Herself she prepared the warm bath, shook into it the requisite amounts of salts, and turned down the covers of the bed.

She sat by Eileen's bedside, asking no confidences, saying nothing, but smoothing the young girl's forehead with a soft hand. Slowly Eileen floated away into half-slumber. Vaguely she heard the bell ring, noticed that Mrs. Kelton's stroking fingers ceased their movement across her forehead. But, if Fannie Holben's voice had been less penetratingly sharp, or had it been raised a moment later, Eileen would not have heard it.

As it was, she raised herself on one elbow and turned her head toward the opened bedroom door.

"I tell you, I've *got* to see Miss Elsing, and I'm going to!" she heard a voice say. She recognized it at once as belonging to the girl whom she had met last Saturday night at the Maison d'Or, the

girl who danced so much with Jimmy, and against whom she had warned Baird. Exhaustion left her at once. Her feet swung to the floor and found a pair of slippers. She drew a dressing-gown about her.

"I'll see Miss Holben," she called.

"Alone," said Fannie, as Eileen entered the living-room.

With a shrug, Eileen glanced at Mrs. Kelton. That lady left the room.

XXI

EILEEN, drawing her intimate robe about her, sensed at once not only her disadvantage but the fact that Fannie Holben was an opponent. She promptly sat down, obeying that instinctive impulse which arises from our belief that one seated is in the position of giving orders to one standing. It is a belief founded upon historical fact. Kings remain seated while courtiers stand around.

"You wished to see me?" she asked. There was in her voice a cool insolence that brought the red to the other girl's cheeks. Uninvited, Fannie sat down.

"Maybe you want to see me," she countered. Her voice was intentionally rude.

Eileen's eyebrows lifted.

"I was not aware of the wish," she said.

Anger blazed in Fannie's eyes. She had been conscious of her advantage when Eileen, sleepy-eyed, had entered the room. Now, in some fashion unknown to her, Eileen had taken command of the situation. Fannie had come to make demands; uneasiness possessed her already.

"You'll be glad I came before I leave," she told Eileen. Eileen folded her hands on her lap. The placidity of the action angered the visitor still

more. "Maybe you think we've nothing in common," she almost shouted.

"I am sure of it," said Eileen.

"All right; listen to me," said Fannie: "Suppose I tell you I can put Rodney Baird in jail?"

"*Are* you telling me that?" asked Eileen.

"You heard me."

Eileen's color heightened the least bit.

"Is that all you wished to say?"

"It's enough, ain't it?" snapped Fannie.

"Too much. I couldn't imagine that you could possibly have anything to tell me that mattered; I can't imagine it now. Is that all, you are quite sure?"

This was not what Fannie had come for. She was perfectly willing to anger Eileen, but—she wanted money. Baird had refused it. But Eileen was in love with Baird—so Ladd had intimated. Jimmy Ladd had said that she'd been practically engaged to Blackmar until Baird had come along a few days ago.

"Oh, I don't suppose that you're interested in *how* I can do it," said Fannie.

"Not in the least," said Eileen.

Fannie was dazed. She had looked for some wild outburst of indignant denial that Baird could do anything wrong. If this girl were in love with Baird, that would be her normal attitude, Fannie thought. But here was total disinterestedness. For Fannie was used to people whose emotions were unveiled. Had she been accustomed to Eileen's sort

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of people, she would have known that the very calm of Eileen meant terrific tension.

She stirred uneasily. Her hope had been that Eileen would immediately telephone Baird, asking him to deny this base accusation. Then Baird would know that Fannie meant business, and an arrangement would be very simple.

But here was, as Fannie saw Eileen, no love-lorn young woman, overcome at the threat of jail for her lover. Here was a young woman who seemed annoyed, bored, at an intrusion. And that was all.

Fannie rose to her feet. She flounced indignantly across the room. Without a word, she walked out.

The Plaza, half a block away, invited her. She entered and called up Baird. He was in, and answered at once.

"This is Fannie Holben. I've been to see Miss Elsing. I've told her about you, Mr. Baird. But I haven't told her much. I can square it. Will you come across now?"

Baird's laugh was pleasant.

"Sorry, Miss Holben. I don't understand you yet. Miss Elsing just telephoned of your call. She is rather annoyed, though. I'm afraid that I'll begin to be annoyed soon. You'd better stop it. And your friend Mr. Landers also called up. Seems that he knew you were in my rooms."

"Did Mr. Ladd tell him? Did he know I was there?" she asked.

"That why you were frightened at Jimmy's calling? No, indeed. It seems that Mr. Landers takes

a quaint interest in me, too. Better think up a good story for him, Miss Holben."

She almost choked. Virtue was certainly in wrong to-night. Legitimately, she'd demanded of Baird a piece of his illicit profit, and he'd turned her down. She'd gone to his sweetheart, as she termed Eileen, expecting to be able to get her so excited that Baird would come to time; and the best she had ahead of her was a "bawling-out" from Landers for going to a man's rooms.

"'Good story!' I'll tell him the truth."

"And let him think that you were willing and anxious to trim him? I hardly think so, Miss Holben."

Baird's laugh was again pleasant as he hung up the telephone.

It was the truth. She had tried to double-cross Frankie, and she'd better do as Baird suggested—think up a story to placate her jealous suitor. She slumped into a chair in the hotel corridor while she set her mind to work.

But back in his rooms at Derriby's Baird was in little better mental plight. Eileen had telephoned him. She had been annoyed; but beneath her annoyance he read something else. It was as though the annoyance was feigned, a pretense behind which she hid something else. That something else was jealousy, he honestly believed. Jealousy of Fannie Holben. And what bothered him was that he could not think of words wherewith to remove the jealousy that would not also lead to confession of the truth.

Eileen—any woman, indeed—would be willing to

believe that Fannie's visit and threats were due to jealousy at Baird's attentions to Eileen. If this were the end of Fannie's efforts to gain money from him, he could take a chance, assure Eileen that the girl had misinterpreted his attitude, was jealous. That is, if he wanted to lie. And he didn't want to lie—not to Eileen. But if he didn't tell her some such story, what *would* he tell her?

Why hadn't he paid Fannie what she demanded? But he shook his head. No, *sir!* He'd taken all of that money that he intended to take. He was going to begin replacing it from his salary now, not make further inroads into it. He'd not be blackmailed. He'd assured himself of this before, and he assured himself of it now. He meant it. At least, he thought he meant it.

XXII

BAIRD had been quiet during their dinner at Orlanno's. Too tactful to make inquiries, Jimmy accepted Baird's statement that he had a headache, and had offered no objection when Baird had begged off from attending a theater.

But he could not emulate Baird's example and go home. He'd been through three days of arranging for a funeral and carrying through the arrangements. It was, he told himself, his night to howl.

The performance for which he had procured two seats bored him. The prima donna couldn't sing; he was sick to death of ballroom dancers, and the chorus-girls were not any too easy on the eye.

"And I wish to goodness that the comedians would lay off the prohibition jokes," he muttered, as, at the end of the first act, he fought his way out into the lobby and street.

He crossed Forty-second Street and walked up Fifth Avenue. Merely for the satisfaction of looking at people he entered the Plaza. He came through the revolving door just as Fannie Holben was wearily arising from the seat upon which she had slumped after telephoning Baird. Jimmy was before her, beaming, before she was standing upright.

" 'God's in his heaven, all's well with the world,' " he announced.

He drew her left hand inside his right arm; he patted her fingers into place.

"This is no place for a gent and lady on pleasure bent," he declared. "Not now. An hour from now, when the grill is packed, yes. But, meantime whither do we wend our blithesome way, Miss Holben?"

"You may take me home," she told him.

" 'Home?' Of course. Later. Meanwhile——" He released her hand long enough to impel her gently through the revolving door. He held up his hand. The taxi-starter immediately blew his whistle; a car drew up before them at once, and Fannie found herself inside it before she could protest. Jimmy spoke the name of a well-known restaurant to the chauffeur.

"Looka here, Mr. Ladd," said Fannie, as they bumped over the uneven pavement of Fifty-ninth Street: "I didn't say that I'd go anywhere with you."

"I'd hardly expect you to—so soon," grinned Jimmy. "After you know me better and have learned to love me—— Who kept you waiting so long in the Plaza?"

"Huh? Any time I wait round for anyone—I stepped in to telephone. Then I was going home——"

"Glad you put it in the imperfect tense," he interrupted. "We will not make it perfect. I'm a lonesome man. Will you dance the evening hours away with me, for sweet charity's sake?"

She eyed Ladd speculatively. He had seemed, the other night, to be genuinely attracted to her. He was a millionaire. He was young. He was good-looking, too. Jolly, also. Open-handed. Her smile was as warmly encouraging as she could manage as she said:

"I'll tell the world I'll dance with you, Mr. Ladd. It'll cheer me up, too. I'm awful blue."

"So? We will kill lonesomeness and the blues with one wallop," grinned Jimmy. "It's a wonderful thing, isn't it?"

"What?" she demanded.

"Fate, destiny, whatever you want to call it. Long before either of us were born, it was written down that on this Wednesday night you'd be blue and I'd be lonesome, that we'd meet, dance together——"

"You're a great josher, ain't you?" she laughed. A lurch of the taxi threw her close to him! she did not withdraw.

The restaurant had its usual crowd, but there was room on the dance-floor. They entered second-floor room in the middle of an encore. They finished the one-step before permitting the head waiter to guide them to a table.

"Some champagne—no; what are you drinking?" the girl asked.

Jimmy shrugged.

"Ginger ale," he confessed.

She nodded approvingly.

"I remember that you're off the stuff. Ginger ale for me, too."

The waiter departed. He didn't mind their order. There was something about Jimmy Ladd that inspired waiters with confidence; their remuneration, they knew, would depend upon the quality of their service more than upon the amount of the check. The waiter served the ginger ale with as much flourish as he ordinarily used in uncorking champagne.

The couple came back hot and thirsty from the next dance. Jimmy gulped his drink.

"I'm here to state that this is far better than being at home," he declared.

"It's a lot better," admitted Fannie.

Jimmy nodded approvingly.

"I told you that it wouldn't take me long. Have you begun to love me already?"

The girl pursed her lips.

"I'm not sure that it would be very hard," she told him.

"Eh?" Conceit was not in the heart of Jimmy Ladd. He raised a warning finger. "Don't you lure me, woman; don't you lure me. I'll tell Frankie Landers on you."

She shrugged.

"Suit yourself. But what Frankie doesn't know won't bother him."

Jimmy lighted a cigarette. He eyed her carefully. In her eyes, that met his squarely, he thought he read a hint of desperation. His own eyes grew suddenly kindly.

"You really *have* been blue, haven't you? What's wrong? Could I help?"

"Men always want to help, don't they?" she

sneered. "Their idea of helping usually means——" She paused abruptly.

"Yes? What does it mean?" he asked.

She shrugged.

"You know. I don't need to spell it out for you. Let's dance."

But he shook his head.

"Wait a bit! What's wrong?"

She sank back in the chair from which she had risen.

"'Wrong?'" she echoed. "Suppose that you had ambition, and some talent, too, and only needed money to get along? How would you feel?"

"Like getting hold of some money," he replied.

"That's what I feel like. And suppose the only way you could get that money was by marrying a man you didn't want to marry, and if you did marry him, you'd have to give up your ambition, anyway —well, what then?"

"Search me," said Jimmy. "That how it is with you?"

"You said it."

"Hm." He cast a quick glance at her. "Landers?"

She nodded.

"Make a good husband," he said.

"I don't want one," she retorted.

"Better terms than lots of men would offer," he stated.

She reddened.

"I suppose you think that I couldn't get plenty of men to marry me if I'd let 'em!"

"I didn't say that. I'm thinking in terms of Broadway. Which is most important, money or ambition? I mean, are you ambitious for money only? Landers has plenty of that."

"Don't I know it well enough? I'm thinking of —if I don't pay Frankie Landers back twenty-five hundred dollars in about three weeks, I've *got* to marry him."

There! She had blurted out what had been in the back of her mind since the moment in the taxi when she had consented to go with him. She dropped her hands from her chin and stared, something of defiance in her glance now, at her companion.

Ladd stared, too.

"You can't pay the money, and you don't want the alternative, eh?" he said.

"I'll say so," she said. Her attempt at lightness of tone was almost pathetic. At least, it was so to Jimmy Ladd. After all, she was an amusing sort, and she *was* good-looking.

"Twenty-five hundred isn't such an awful lot," he said.

"It is when you haven't got it," she retorted.

"I suppose so. And—er—I take it that you're not telling me this for the fun of talking."

"I guess you can see through an open window," she answered.

"But Lander had security for his loan," he hinted.

"Well?" She tried to keep her voice steady and

succeeded. But the hands that rested on the table trembled.

"What security would I get for my loan?" he asked.

"You wouldn't want the same as Landers," she evaded.

Jimmy laughed.

"Considering that I never intend to be married —no."

She echoed his laugh, a harsher echo.

"That's what I said a while ago—men's ideas of helping are— Oh, well, you wouldn't lend me the money, then?"

"Have I refused?" he asked.

"You haven't said you would."

"But I might," he grinned.

Her plump face had been red, but now it was white.

"Honest—Frankie is a good guy; but—marriage —I don't want it. And if I don't settle with him, he'll keep me off the stage. Oh, he *can*, all right. He's got a pull like a truck on low. And I could make good—but what's the use? It takes forever unless you've got some money— Will you give me the twenty-five hundred?"

"'Give?' I thought you wanted a loan."

But she had made a decision, and not so suddenly as it might have seemed to an auditor.

She had tried definitely to blackmail Baird. She had failed. She might manage to wreak some sort of vengeance on Baird, but that she might get money

from him—one failure was sufficient to render her hopeless of success.

She must marry Landers, go back to waiting on table, or—the third alternative presented itself in the person of Jimmy Ladd. There had been other men who would have gladly been such an alternative as Jimmy was now, but—the time and the need had not coincided. That virtue on which she had prided herself, she suddenly realized, was no rock, proof against any assault. It was yielding itself easily, but—what difference did it make? Moreover, Jimmy Ladd was no ogre.

He was smiling at her now. The faint mist that had clouded her vision vanished. She shrugged.

"What difference does it make what we call it? Do I get it?"

"Where are you living?" he asked.

Wonderingly, she named a cheap hotel on Seventh Avenue.

He shook his head.

"It won't do. No sort of a place at all. Can't you find yourself a decent furnished apartment? To-morrow?"

She nodded.

"Do it," he said.

They were in a corner of the room. It was quite easy for him to draw a fountain pen and check-book from his pocket and scribble some lines without being seen. He handed the pink slip of paper to her. Her eyes widened.

"This is five thousand," she whispered.

"Oh, well." He laughed. "The apartment will

cost something, and you probably need some clothes. What's money between—friends?"

He did not offer to see her home—merely put her in a taxi a little later, giving the chauffeur her address and a bill.

"'Phone me at the office to-morrow and let me know where you're living. I'll be up to-morrow night."

"Aren't you—how do you know—I might cash this check—and not—'phone you," she said, unsteadily.

He laughed easily.

"Oh, I don't think so. You were pretty worried about keeping your word to Landers, but I guess that you were going to. I'm certainly as well worth keeping a promise to as he, eh?"

For answer, she leaned forward swiftly and kissed him.

He drew his coat closer about him as the taxi sped away. Then he chuckled as he started home.

XXIII

IT was nearly noon on Thursday morning when Eileen awoke. She'd had a miserable night of it. Two and two make four. Blackmar had intimated things against Baird, and Fannie Holben had stated that she could put the young man in jail. Of course, Blackmar's insinuations might readily be accounted for by jealousy of Baird. Fannie Holben's threat might be laid to jealousy of Eileen. At all events, these things were unpleasant.

More than once she had sat up in bed, with the intention of telephoning Baird again. Once she had even taken the receiver from the telephone hook. But only to hang it up. She'd 'phoned him once and told him that Fannie Holben had called upon her and made threats against him. And he had merely been apologetic because she had been annoyed, had assured her that it wouldn't happen again.

But she wouldn't—couldn't—'phone him again. And in her heart she knew why. She wanted him to have an explanation ready; she wanted to give him time. Why?

She sneered at herself. Was she a love-sick miss whose lover *must* be perfect, must seem perfect? Or was she a grown woman, mistress of herself, inde-

pendent, who, finding imperfection in a lover, could coolly rid herself of him and await a perfect specimen?

Bigger than her own inheritance, bigger than anything that had yet entered her life loomed the figure of Rodney Baird. She rang for her maid. As she was about to enter her tub, the telephone-bell jingled.

"Eileen? . . . This is Eleanor Cather. . . . When? . . . This morning. . . . Everyone's fine. . . . May I see you? . . . Right away? I'm coming."

Eileen's frown, that had been on her forehead even before she awakened, vanished. Eleanor Cather was a lot of fun; she'd tell her all the latest racy Dorchester gossip, and—Eleanor Cather *knew Rodney Baird!*

She was extremely cordial when Miss Cather, twenty minutes later, entered her bedroom. Eileen was sitting up in bed, most becomingly arrayed in a pink, lacy bedroom jacket. Her auburn hair hung over either shoulder in thick braids.

Eleanor Cather, after kissing her, drew back and surveyed her carefully. She shook her head wonderingly.

"I came expecting to find you a regular cripple, old dear," she said. "Instead—Eileen, where do you buy your rouge?"

"Cat!" said Eileen. "Old Doctor Nature furnishes it."

"I wish he'd take me for a patient," sighed Eleanor.

"Fishing," commented Eileen. She dug her spoon into her grapefruit. "Have some coffee?"

"Wish I could," said Miss Cather enviously. "Makes me yellow. But you can do anything—even act the Christian martyr and take care of a whole bereaved family. Eileen, you're a wonder! I met Dan Seeley last night just before I went aboard the train. He was just back from the funeral. Told me what a perfect peach you'd been; also told me that Bellew Elsing had done the decent thing. Congratulations, old dear. Want to hire a companion?"

"Looking for a job?" asked Eileen.

"Seriously," Eleanor said, in a moment, "if Bob keeps on, I don't know what will become of me."

Eileen's mouth pursed in sympathy.

"What's he been up to now?" she asked. "I thought he'd rather been behaving himself."

"So did I—in his own peculiarly disreputable fashion," snapped Eleanor. "I don't know where he gets his wildness."

"Oh, he'll steady down after a while," said Eileen soothingly.

Eleanor sniffed.

"I'd like to think so. So would the rest of the family. But—he's my own brother, Eileen. I can stand a Cather drinking, but when it comes to acting as private detective for a hotel waitress——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Eileen.

"Exactly what I said. Some girl over here—name of Bolton or Holstein—that would be more like it; she's cattle!"

"Holben?" interposed Eileen.

Her visitor straightened in her chair.

"That's it! You know her?"

"Perhaps. Go ahead."

"There isn't much to go ahead about. Bob was in Donchester the first of the week. I didn't know it. His lordship never deigns to keep the family informed of his doings unless he's in need of money. But he had luncheon one day with Willie Curtiss. They drank too much, and Bob talked too much. Willie told his sister and she told me, of course. Cat! She's by way of being a fifty-eighth cousin of mine, you know, and how she loves to compare Bob with her own darling little fair-haired brother. Well, anyway, Bob told Willie that a girl who used to be a waitress in Simpson's—it's a restaurant, lunch-room, where all the men go—pretty girls, you know. One of them married a nephew of the governor the other day; I'm thinking some of us might well take jobs there. Well, anyway, she's a sort of half-baked actress now, I gather. And she has her battery trained on one Rodney Baird. What! Do you know him, too?"

Eileen forced a look of innocence. She hated herself for her start at Baird's name.

"I've met him," she said.

Miss Cather whistled.

"I take it he's rising in the world. I remembered the name the moment Jeanne Curtiss mentioned it. Used to go to high-school. Gawky boy; rather good-looking, though. But nobody."

"Where does Baird fit into this picture-puzzle?" asked Eileen.

She tried to make her voice unconcerned and sipped at her coffee.

"I guess he's been cutting rather a dash over here," answered Eleanor. "Anyway, I take it that he's making violent love to the Holben girl, and—she commissioned my brother Bob to visit Dorchester and look him up." Her eyes filled with contempt. "Imagine Bob doing a thing like that! It's low; it's—it's *filthy!*"

"Well," Eileen admitted, "it's not the sort of thing one wants in one's biography in 'Who's Who.'"

"Hardly," agreed Eleanor. "So I've come over to Bob with the ultimatum from the family. If he must be a rotter, he must be one a long way off. He's been receiving an allowance, you know—and we can't afford it any too well. And we're going to stop it unless he takes a train for somewhere west of the Mississippi and *stays* there."

"What did he find out about Baird? Did Jeanne tell you?" inquired Eileen. She tried to make her tone casual.

"Oh, she told me all right. Not that it mattered. What did Bob find out? Oh, the man's a bookkeeper or something like that on a spree, I gather. Hasn't a penny to bless himself with. Maybe a few thousand—oh, practically nothing. I suppose this Holben—that her name?—will throw him over quick. How'd you know her, anyway?"

Eileen shrugged.

"Oh, one meets everyone. As a matter of fact, I think that it was Mr. Baird who introduced us."

"I fancy his cheek," commented Miss Cather. "So—you know Baird. How on earth——"

"Friend of Jimmy Ladd's. Comrades in arms—all that sort of thing. Working for Jimmy now."

"Oh, I say! If I've injured him——"

"How could you? I hardly know the man. Met him a few times—that's all."

"And does he seem the sort to tie himself up with a waitress?" asked Miss Cather.

"O Lord, my dear! What a question! What does one know of the sort of sort our dearest man friend is?"

"Until we marry him. Then we find out that he's the lowest sort," chuckled Miss Cather. "At least, if one listens to one's friends." She rose. "Bless your heart for letting me drop in and shift the Cather burden for a while to your shoulders. Darned handsome shoulders, old dear, too!" she said admiringly.

"Thanks!" said Eileen. She drew the lacy jacket that had slipped down a bit closer about her. "Where you going? Aren't you going to spree it a bit and everything?"

"With that disgusting brother on my neck? I should say not! I wouldn't have dropped in at all, Eileen, only Dan Seeley's news was so good that I *had* to congratulate you. How much? He said three or four million."

Eileen shook her head.

"It's a long ride to Donchester. Things look

bigger after you've thought about them. A million, maybe."

"It's a bunch," said Eleanor slangily. "For goodness' sake, take care of it, old darling!"

"But you mustn't go so soon," protested Eileen.

"Must. Engagement to-morrow for luncheon. I wired Bob. Told him to meet me at the Plaza at one. I'm going to talk straight to that brother of mine. Then I'm going to wash my hands of him—for good."

"Aren't you a bit cruel, Eleanor?"

Her visitor's eyes suddenly clouded.

"Eileen, if you know how I felt! He's my *brother*. But he's been given every chance. Eileen, this thing—there are certain lapses that don't matter. They're physical things, not moral. One forgives them. But this—the eyes of his soul see crookedly."

Miss Cather left. Eileen analyzed what she had told her. Fannie Holben had had Baird investigated. Baird had no money. Fannie Holben had told Eileen that she could jail Baird. What was the nature of the thing that he had done? She was going to find out.

There was anger in her eyes as she reached for the telephone and called up Sam Blackmar. Blackmar could tell her. He must make good his hints of last Sunday. And if he couldn't or wouldn't—She put the telephone down just as she heard Blackmar's voice.

She—she couldn't ask Blackmar about Baird.

Not about Baird. It—it was foolishness, that's what it was. She was silly, sentimental, but—

"Good Lord," she told herself ten minutes later, looking into the mirror and trying to smile at the disheveled reflection that it gave forth, "a girl has to love some one, doesn't she? And if he happens to be a rotter, why—well, the quicker she knows it the quicker she'll begin getting over her love, eh? Buck up, Eileen!"

This time, when she reached for the telephone, she did not put it down until she had talked with Blackmar and he had eagerly agreed to take her to luncheon.

But the luncheon, as far as her purposes were concerned, was a failure. Blackmar was extremely reticent on the subject of Baird.

"I was hasty the other day, Eileen. I was—jealous. Let it go at that and forgive me for being a cad. But now—what's the use? You've money. You'll marry whom you want."

"Your money being your only asset, eh, Sam?" she asked.

"I suppose so." He was extremely meek, extremely downcast.

"Well, I haven't married anyone yet, Sam, you know. Maybe I never shall. And you really have nothing definite to tell me about Mr. Baird?"

He colored faintly and shook his head.

"Nothing at all, except—I wouldn't hurry, Eileen."

"I'll not," she told him.

She left him with the definite feeling that, for

some reason or other, he'd been lying. It wasn't jealousy alone that made him intimate things against Baird last Sunday. But when Sam Blackmar wanted to be a close-mouth, a clam was an open-throat beside him.

Very well, then. Maybe Miss Fannie Holben could be made to talk if Sam Blackmar wouldn't. But why on earth had Sam refused to make good his hints of Sunday? She gave it up. Life was complex, and people were more so.

XXIV

DEAR FRANKIE: Here's your twenty-five hundred. You're a good sport and I'm much obliged. Your friend, FANNIE.

Landers read the note, written sprawlingly on cheap and scented paper, over again. He read it once more. His gray eyes, always hard, were flinty.

"So I'm a good sport, am I? And she's much obliged? And she's my friend, Fannie, is she?"

He put the note down and picked up the *Morning Telegraph*. But the racing and theatrical news held no interest for him to-day. He reached for the note again. He examined the check, drawn to the order of Francis Charles Landers. He put it down and reread the address at the head of the note. East Thirty-fifth Street, in the old Murray Hill section. And not a hotel, nor yet—he guessed—a boarding-house.

Fannie had an apartment! And she'd been broke, busted flat, a few days ago. Yet this morning she returned to him his loan. Well, there was only one way that a woman got the money in this man's town—

He dressed rather slowly, taking meticulous care with his shaving, with the adjustment of his tie,

with the selection of the close-coupled studs for the sleeves of his expensive and noisy silk shirt.

Down-stairs, in the Tramby café, he breakfasted with the same deliberation that had characterized his dressing. One would have known him intimately to realize that anything had gone wrong in the Landers life.

His hearty breakfast finished, Landers quietly paid the check. He was cordial to the hat-boy, and tipped him generously for aiding him with his rather bulky fur-lined overcoat. He nodded smilingly to a couple of acquaintances in the lobby, was deprecating in his refusal of a taxi from the starter outside.

"Nice brisk morning, Tom; think I'd rather walk."

"Certainly, sir. Do you good, sir. Nothing like the morning air, sir." The starter touched his hat.

There was something determined in Landers' walk as he strode eastward. But again one would have known him well to understand that that firm tread was due to repression. The most important rule in the social code of the professional gambler is that he must wear, no matter how badly the luck breaks against him, an appearance of nonchalance. It is extremely bad form to "beef" about your losses.

So, because he was used to veiling his emotions, Landers veiled them to-day. He was wearing his usual calm expression when he rang the bell above the card bearing the name: "F. Holben," in the doorway of the apartment-house on East Thirty-

fifth Street. It was a modest enough, old-fashioned building, a private dwelling remodeled.

"Nice, quiet place," said Landers to himself, as the door, in response to his ring, swung open.

His stride, as he mounted the stairs to the second floor, was still determined, assured; but there was a heaviness in it that one hardly expected from one of his lithe figure.

Fannie herself was standing in the doorway on the second floor. If her heart skipped a beat, she still managed a smile.

"Frankie! Aren't you good to come around so soon?"

Landers passed through the door. He hung his hat and coat on a stand in the hall and followed the girl into a living-room. It was a pleasant room, furnished rather better than Landers had, somehow or other, expected. Oddly, too, the room was homelike. Fannie was a *home person*, and he'd always known it.

He sat down; his hands fell upon his knees. He looked down upon the floor, avoiding her eyes. Her courage rose at this evidence of acquiescence.

"Yeh, I'm good, all right," he said. His voice was colorless, leaden.

"Indeed you are! Don't you like my little home?" She was a bit too bright of voice. Her courage was rising.

"Yeh; I like it all right. I'd rather picked it out myself, but so long's you're satisfied, I guess I can enjoy it, too."

Like a balloon that had been pierced by an enemy

shell in mid-air, the Holben courage sank. She drew upon her store of insolence that so often deceives by its masquerade of bravery.

"You're twenty minutes late, more or less, Frankie," she said.

"Uh-huh. I often miss the train; but I get where I want to go just the same, Fannie. Now—" From his pocket he took the letter that she had sent him. Carefully, with steady fingers, he took out her check. His calmness frightened her.

"Now this, of course, I'll just tear up," he said. He folded the pink slip and tore it carefully in two. He looked round, apparently in search of a waste-basket. Not seeing one, he put the bits of paper on the table. Then, still deliberately, he brought out his check-book.

"How much, Fannie?" he asked.

"How much what?" She tried to put defiance into her voice.

"Oh, all this." He gestured vaguely around him. "The rent—you got some new clothes, too, I suppose. All of it."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I suppose you don't. How big a stake did he give you?"

"Who?"

"Yeh. I want to know that, too. Though it's easy to guess. Some rapid worker, this Baird. Oh, well, the faster they go the harder they crash."

Once again her heart seemed to stop. She hadn't realized that Frankie was as much in earnest as he really was. Now she understood. He'd been so

casual in his love-making, so content, apparently, to bide his time, that she had thought that he'd perhaps let her drift out of his life without attempt to stay her. Now she knew better.

"I don't want your money," she said. "I sent you back——"

A shake of his head interrupted her.

"It ain't what you do, Fannie. It's what *I* do. Get that into your nut, will you, kid? It'll save time and mistakes if you do." For a moment, he looked into her eyes. Then his own dropped down, but not before she had time to glimpse the steely wrath in them. "How much?" he demanded.

The girl's weak resistance crumpled.

"Five thousand," she muttered. Then, suddenly, she collapsed. Her head fell forward into her arms and her body shook with the vehemence of her sobbing.

Calmly, Landers wrote in his check-book. He tore out the slip on which he had written and put it in his waistcoat pocket. He returned the book to the pocket in his jacket. Then he rose deliberately.

"That's all right, Fannie," he said heavily. "Cry all you want; it'll do you good. I'm going out now. I'll be back——"

"Frankie!" She lifted her eyes, from which the tears streamed down her plump cheeks. Some women are fortunate enough to be able to let their spirituality shine through their sorrow. But Fannie Holben was never so much of the earth earthy, never so fleshly, as when she wept. Yet it so hap-

pened that she was the one woman whom Frankie Landers had ever desired to marry. "Don't—Frankie—don't you——"

"Don't fret about me. I know my way round in the dark," he told her. In his voice there was a hint of softness. To him she had never been so appealing, so utterly desirable, as in this moment. Women were only children; they ought to weep when they were caught in naughtiness. But the softness went as quickly as it had come. "You pack!"

"What?"

"You heard me. You pack your things!"

He walked into the hall, climbed into his heavy overcoat and left the apartment.

Defiance had been in Fannie Holben's heart when she had sent Landers the check last night. She had known that, sooner or later, Landers would find out where she was living. Why postpone the inevitable? Also, her note and its enclosure would hurt Landers. Landers had driven a bargain with her. What right had a man to drive a bargain with a woman whom he pretended to love? It had pleased her to hurt him. But his presence had aroused fear. Now— He was going to see Baird; she was sure of it. She rushed to the telephone and called up Ladd & Company.

"Mr. James Ladd, junior," she said.

"Out of town," came the bored reply of the telephone-clerk.

She had known it. Last Wednesday night, Jimmy Ladd had given her a check for five thousand dol-

lars. She had telephoned his office the next day to learn that he was out of town. She had telephoned again on Friday. He was still out of town. Then she had written him a note, giving him her address. Yet she had not heard from him. And today was Tuesday. Almost a week since he had written her his check, and she had not heard a word from him.

"Give me Mr. Baird, please," she said. She hated to speak with Baird. She'd hoped that Jimmy might have returned this morning, that she could tell him the mistake under which Landers labored. To tell Baird— "This is Miss Holben," she said.

"Yes?" Baird's tone was cold. Six nights ago, Eileen had telephoned him of Fannie's visit. Since then, Eileen's maid had always answered; Miss Elsing was not at home. He had called twice; Miss Elsing was not at home.

To Fannie Holben he ascribed his unhappy week. She was to blame for Eileen's coldness, her neglect. No longer was he concerned with the moral aspects of his case. He dealt in physical facts only, now. He had taken the trunk of money from the Tramby; he had used some of it; that use had given him his opportunity in life. Landers had not annoyed him; Blackmar had let him alone. Since Fannie's visit, six nights ago, nothing untoward had happened. He was safe, he reasoned. And it was safety, not ethics, that was most important.

So now, instead of hating the deed that had put him in the position of having to undergo injury at the hands of Fannie Holben, he hated her.

"I just telephoned Mr. Ladd. They tell me he's out of town."

Baird's lips pursed. Jimmy had been in his office this morning.

"Well?"

"Frankie Landers was just here. He found me —I'm living in an *apartment!*"

Baird hardly noticed that she had accented the last word.

"Well?" he said again.

The girl hesitated. She was talking to a man whom she had tried to blackmail, and she was now trying to impress him with her virtue.

"Mr. Ladd is paying for this apartment where I'm living," she blurted.

Baird whistled.

"It's not what you think!" she cried. "He hasn't been here once; he's been away. But Frankie Landers thinks——"

"Why tell me all this? I'm not concerned," said Baird.

"Because Frankie thinks it's *you!* And he's on his way down-town now, and—I'm awful scared," she wailed.

Not content with damning him with Eileen, as she had evidently succeeded in doing, she was damning him with Landers, rousing hatred in a man who already suspected him of having in his possession money to which Landers had some sort of title.

"Why?" he demanded. "Why did you tell him——"

"I didn't tell him anything!" she cried. "He

guessed it was you. For goodness' sake look out for yourself!"

"I'll take care of myself," he said angrily. He hung up the receiver with a bang, and walked out to the telephone-clerk, wondering how much she had overheard. But the young woman was engrossed in a book.

"Some one had me on the telephone—wanted Mr. Ladd," he said.

The young woman nodded.

"Mr. Ladd told me, the middle of last week, that he was away on a business trip to anyone who called up."

Baird nodded. He continued on to Ladd's office. But Jimmy, according to his secretary, had gone out an hour ago.

In his own office, Baird walked impatiently up and down. He was not in the least afraid of Landers, but—he wished that Jimmy was there.

Landers did not send in his name. He walked boldly by the door-porter. Baird's office was at the end of the hall that led from the reception-room. His name was upon the door. Landers entered.

Baird wheeled suddenly. The rapid movement disconcerted Landers, so that he did what otherwise he would not have done—not at once, at any rate. He whipped out a revolver.

Baird had just returned from Europe. Arms and the use of them were no novelty in his recent life. And, in that recent life, arms had been drawn for use, not for threat. He leaped forward, swaying his body from side to side, as a fast boxer does.

Landers had time to fire once. Then Baird was upon him, and had wrenched the weapon from the fingers of the slighter man. With his right hand, he held Landers away from him.

"Be quiet, you fool!" he snapped. "*Sit down!*"

To kill was one thing. To fail to kill was another. Landers could have killed. After killing, he could have carefully planned his escape. But to have merely fired at a man, and to be compelled to face a jail-sentence after having been disgracefully disarmed by his enemy— Landers was white as Baird walked to the door.

Two clerks were hurrying down the hall.

"Mr. Ladd in yet?" demanded Baird.

The clerks stopped short at sight of him. One of them wiped his forehead.

"Thought we heard a shot or something, Mr. Baird," he giggled.

"A 'shot?'" Baird stared at them blankly. "Oh—I knocked over a book-case. No; I'll put it back myself. Mr. Ladd not in?"

"No; not yet, sir."

"Very well." Baird closed the door upon them. He wheeled toward Landers.

"Get out!" he said.

For the first time in his life, Landers was whipped. Mechanically, he reached for his hat and left the office. On the steps outside, he met Jimmy Ladd. A touch of color swept into Ladd's cheeks.

"Did you want to see me, Landers?" he asked.

Landers shook his head.

"No; I saw Baird."

Jimmy pursed his lips. Curious, a little disturbed, he knocked, a moment later, on the door of Baird's office. A harsh whisper asked who it was. He replied.

"Come in," said Baird.

Baird was sitting in his swivel chair. His coat was off and he was tying a blood-stained towel around his arm.

"Well, for—who— Rod!" cried Jimmy.

Baird looked at him grimly.

"Nice mess you got me into, Jimmy. Landers thinks I've been putting up for that Holben girl, and——" He grinned. "Never thought my army training would help much in this life. I got his gun——"

"And let him go?" gasped Ladd.

"Well, did you want me to call in the office staff, and have Landers arrested, and have it come out that he potted the wrong man?"

A vivid blush swept over Jimmy's face.

"Rod—you're *some* boy! I——"

"Forget the bless-you-my-son stuff," groaned Baird. "Do you know a doctor that'll keep his mouth shut?"

"But can you wait——"

"It's stopped bleeding," announced Baird. "Help me on with my coat. It's not much more than a scratch."

They left the office by a side exit, little used, and were fortunate enough to find a taxicab im-

mediately. And Doctor Mensted, an old chum of Jimmy's, was the soul of discretion itself.

"Stay in bed twenty-four hours," he advised, after he had attended to the wound, "and you'll never know you've been hurt."

XXV

DOCTOR MENSTED was the soul of discretion, but his office-nurse was not. She had recognized Jimmy Ladd. Any young woman who read the society pages was bound, sooner or later, to run across a picture of Jimmy doing something or other. Having assisted the doctor in the sterilization of instruments and bandaging up Baird's wounded left arm, she was experienced enough to recognize that a bullet had caused the injury.

She talked that night to a young man at her boarding-house. The young man had a friend on an afternoon newspaper. Before ten, on Wednesday morning, a reporter interviewed Jimmy Ladd.

Of course, he learned nothing. Equally of course, the reporter's paper, the *Blade*, dared publish nothing. Libel is a heavy threat, especially when made by one who has money wherewith to press a suit.

But the mischief was done, although Doctor Mensted backed up Jimmy in his denial that he had treated anyone for a bullet-wound. The nurse was discharged, and one would have thought that the incident could have been considered closed. The nurse did not know the name of Jimmy's wounded companion.

But rumor travels upon wings, and finally it

reached the ears of a young woman who, under the *nom-de-plume* of "The Divorcee," supplied *City Items* with some of the paragraphs that made that weekly journal so popular.

It reached the editorial offices of *City Items* on Thursday, in time to catch that week's issue of the paper. So it happened that, on Friday noon, Jennie Elsing read the paragraph. She immediately called up Eileen, and Eileen sent her maid out for a copy of the paper.

She found the paragraph easily. It was the first one in The Divorcee's column.

A certain young millionaire who acquitted himself creditably in France has been on the water-wagon almost a fortnight, and his friends, realizing what a triumph this was, had hoped for big things, especially since his multimillionaire father has taken him into partnership. But some people, on quitting drink, take to other things. This young man, it is said, has not substituted drugs for liquor. A revolver is his substitute. At any rate, he took a friend of his—name unknown—to a certain famous surgeon last Tuesday. Apparently, the two youths were friendly still, but that may have been camouflage for spying servants or nurses. Mr. Unknown Friend had a bullet-hole in his left arm. Puzzle: Who did it? And why?

Of course, Jimmy Ladd was the young millionaire. A cold chill crept over Eileen's heart as she put the sheet down. *City Items* was scandalous,

libelous, but—it told the truth, mostly, viciously unnecessary as publication of the truth might be.

There was no reason on earth for Eileen to connect Baird with the story. But—if it had been an intimate friend of long standing, whoever had seen Jimmy enter a doctor's office would have recognized the friend as well as Jimmy. But Baird, being a recent friend— It was absurd! Nevertheless, Eileen telephoned Jimmy Ladd.

"What's all this scandal in *Items* about you, Jimmy?" she demanded.

"It doesn't mean me, that's all," lied Jimmy unhesitatingly.

"Then you haven't been keeping away from me merely because you disliked having my fair name coupled with a young would-be murderer?"

"But Baird's been telling me that you were away."

"Because I am 'out' to him doesn't necessarily mean that you couldn't have found me in," she retorted.

"Eh? What's wrong with you and Rod?" he demanded.

"Was there ever anything particularly 'right' with us?" she countered.

"Don't take that tone with me, young woman," he told her. "I'm not bound to your chariot-wheels any more."

"Please, sir, Mr. Ladd, sir, will you eat dinner with a lonely young woman?"

"That's a whole lot better," he approved. "Tonight?"

"At seven," she replied.

"I'll be wid yez," he said.

He was, to all appearances, a young man with nothing on his soul but his flesh. He was merry as usual. And tactfully, not until dinner was finished and he had lighted the inevitable cigarette, did she approach the subject which, by tacit mutual consent, had been thus far avoided.

"Jimmy, I want to talk to you about Rodney Baird."

"I thought so," he jeered. "What have you two quarreled about?"

Her lips curled a moment.

"We haven't been intimate enough for a quarrel, Jimmy."

"Then why does he think you're still out of town?"

"Jimmy, you're my friend, aren't you?"

"The best you'll ever have, Eileen," he assured her.

"Then it's all right. Well then—I want to know something about Mr. Baird."

Jimmy puffed on his cigarette.

"Fire away," he invited.

"Just after I met him, Sam Blackmar objected to his coming here."

"Jealous," commented Jimmy.

"One night last week, that Holben girl called on me."

Jimmy glanced at her swiftly.

"Called on you?"

"To tell me that she could put Mr. Baird in jail if she chose."

"What?"

"The next day, Eleanor Cather dropped in. Told me that the Holben woman had paid her brother to investigate Baird in Donchester. Eleanor was naturally angry at Bob. She thought he'd sunk rather low. So did I. But—Bob had discovered that Baird was practically penniless."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Jimmy pugnaciously.

"I don't know. Why should the Holben woman pay Cather to look up Baird? Does she hope to marry him?"

"Rot!" declared Jimmy.

"Why did she come to me?"

"Thought you'd be interested enough to buy her off," suggested Jimmy.

Eileen colored.

"I wasn't. I didn't even ask what she had to say against Mr. Baird."

"What did you do?" asked Jimmy.

"I telephoned him that—that she'd threatened him. That was all."

"And since then?"

"I haven't seen him."

"Refused to see him, eh?"

"Well, supposing I have?"

"Oh, nothing. The easiest way, though, is to ask. That's the way to find out. Why not ask Rod what it all means?"

"And mix myself up with—it all looks like dirt, Jimmy."

"And you'd hate to soil your pretty white hands, eh?" He openly sneered at her.

"And you were considering being engaged to him. I don't think your friendship is worth much, Eileen." He glared at her.

"Jimmy!" she gasped.

"I said it. I mean it," he blazed. "You're the girl that I've always sworn was the finest made. And you quit under fire! Lord, you weren't even under fire!"

She sat bolt upright, her eyes blazing with anger.

"Be careful what you say, Jimmy."

"Careful nothing! You listen to me. You want to know what kind of chap Rod Baird is, don't you? Well, I'll tell you. He's too darned good for you or any other woman that drops a friendship at the first mean whisper."

"I read more than a whisper about you to-day and haven't dropped you," she defended herself.

"And I suppose you pride yourself on that. But I notice that you invited me up here to hear what defense I might have. Well, you'll hear it. That Holben girl—I gave her five thousand dollars one day last week, and put her in an apartment. I did it—I'm a fool, I am. But Frankie Landers is crazy about her. She's a fool—hasn't sense enough to marry him. I figured that when I came to claim my payment—Oh, let me be frank; it won't hurt you—that if there was anything decent in the girl, it would come out, that she'd throw me over like a shot and run to Landers. And just so's she'd have time to think it over, I kept away from her, let her

think I'd gone out of town. You see, I sort of liked the little fool. She's kept herself straight, in her way, until now—I knew she'd balk at payment.

"Well, I stayed away too long. Landers found out, went to see her, got the idea it was Rod who put up for her, came down to the office, and put a bullet into Rod."

Eileen's color deserted her.

"He wasn't——"

"Nothing much. But—he jumped Landers, took his gun away from him, kept the whole business quiet, and—how many men would have let Landers go?"

She managed a sneer.

"He wanted to dodge scandal," she said.

Jimmy looked her over coldly.

"You're pretty mean, Eileen, I'm thinking. Yes; he wanted to dodge scandal. To dodge it for *me!* I found him bandaging up a hole in his arm by himself. I'm his friend. He'd take a bullet for me and keep quiet about it. *That's* friendship, Eileen."

She leaned forward.

"Jimmy, I'm pretty small, am I not?"

"Well, you don't measure up very big, old dear," he told her.

"Is he—still——"

"Oh, he's all right enough. Been three days in bed. Had a bit of a fever, but it's gone now."

"You think he'd like to—hear from me?"

"Don't talk foolishness, Eileen. You know he's mad about you."

He said other things before he left, but this sentence was the one that rang in her ears. Baird was "mad about her!"

And she'd judged him without hearing his defense. Well, she'd make amends. She'd telephone—Telephoning was too cold. She tiptoed into Mrs. Kelton's room. Her chaperon was sound asleep. So, too, judging from the heavy breathing, was her colored maid.

She changed her slippers for stouter Oxfords, and put on a heavy coat. She didn't care for gossip, for talk, for scandal. Baird was too ill to come to her if she sent for him; she was going to him without his sending for her. He was mad about her. It was the sweetest sentence that mortal had ever uttered.

XXVI

FRANKIE LANDERS had been confronted by many strange situations in a life devoted to getting the "sucker-money." Cold nerve had pulled him through all of them. Perfect master of his temper had he always been.

But blind wrath now swayed him. True, he had gone armed to see Baird. But what of that? He was always armed. And, despite the greatest provocation, he had never used a weapon before. He had drawn it—yes; but he had never fired it.

But love is the unknown quantity, and love had entered into the Landers life. And love is inseparably accompanied by jealousy. Jealousy had burned in the heart of Landers from the moment that Fannie Holben had first cautiously mentioned the name of Baird.

Back in the Tramby, Landers slunk into the grill like a whipped pup. He *was* a whipped pup. He'd lost his head completely. Baird had turned from a window, and Landers had shot him. And then, almost contemptuously, Baird had disarmed him and ordered him out of the office. Had Baird knocked him down and handed him over to the police, Landers' feelings would not have been so outraged.

But—what was there to do about it? Landers

had his life to live. With the pressing of the trigger that had sent a bullet cutting into Baird's arm, sanity had returned to Landers. He didn't want to go to the electric chair, or even to jail. Revenge was all very well, but where did it get a guy?

He ordered his fifth high-ball. The waiter who served him grimaced at a fellow. Frankie Landers was on a "spree" again.

It lasted until Thursday night. On Friday morning, Landers awoke. Oddly enough, he didn't feel badly, all things considered. That is, physically. Mentally and morally, he was much improved over Tuesday. He had paid the debt due a non-understandable emotion—the emotion of shame. Some men would have killed themselves; others would have killed Fannie Holben; Landers belonged to another class, a large one, by the way. He got drunk.

He took the hottest bath that he could stand; he followed this with a cold shower, rubbing himself with a coarse towel until it hurt his flesh. Then he drank a tumblerful of orange juice.

Breakfast was light, but he did manage to swallow something. Then he went back to bed. He awoke at six in the afternoon, feeling something like his old self. After all, a two-day "party" was practically nothing to him.

Bathed again, and dressed, even those initiate in the Landers habits would hardly have guessed that Frankie had been intoxicated for two days.

He dined alone in a Broadway restaurant. He ate heartily, but mechanically, his mind far from food.

The situation amounted to this: Baird had been "putting up" for Fannie Holben. Landers loved Fannie Holben. Well?

There was only one thing to "get" Baird. To get him murderously was not the thing. That had been tried. Sober thought following upon the failure had convinced Landers how foolish such attempt had been. Killing Baird wouldn't win Fannie Holben. But getting Baird in another way—ruining him financially and socially.

He was still dallying with this thought when he returned to the Tramby. He was so intent that his scowling eyes refused to focus properly, and Jimmy Ladd had to speak to him twice before surly recognition dawned in the gambler's eyes. Also alarm. Baird worked for Jimmy Ladd, Landers had heard nothing from his assault, as yet, but—

"Where've you been the last couple of days?" demanded Jimmy.

Landers shrugged.

"Oh, the bulls could 'a' found me, all right."

"Were they supposed to be looking for you?" asked Ladd.

Landers shrugged.

"You know," he said.

"You mean that little matter in my office, eh?" Landers shrugged again. "You didn't get my note, then?"

"There's a bunch of mail and telephone messages up-stairs, but I haven't bothered to look at them."

"Let's sit down," said Jimmy.

He led the way to the grill. It was deserted at

this hour, and he waved away the approaching waiter.

"Why did you shoot Baird?" he demanded.

"Fannie," replied Landers laconically.

"You thought that Baird——" He paused.

"Was keeping her? Yes."

"Never occurred to you that it might be some one else, eh?"

"Who?" demanded the gambler.

"Well, myself, for instance?"

"Why?"

"Because I thought that she was a little fool and because I *am* a big fool."

"Well, that reason goes for a lot of things, and women's one of them," said Landers. "So—it was you?"

"I don't see you pulling any gun," said Jimmy.

Landers spread his hands.

"I'm off that. A man ain't such a fool twice in the same way unless he's crazy. I ain't crazy. You seemed like a decent sort of guy, at that, though. How long you been doing the rat act?"

Jimmy's eyes glinted.

"Let's go easy with that sort of talk until you've heard me through," he suggested.

Landers sneered.

"I just wanted you to know that just because I've quit starting anything doesn't mean that I ain't ready to go through with whatever anyone else starts. That rat stuff goes. If you don't like it, holler."

To his surprise, Jimmy's eyes softened; he smiled.

"You're a regular person, after all, Landers. Listen to me. Fannie told me all about borrowing money from you. Told me the terms. She was desperate. She didn't want to marry anyone. She wanted to go on the stage. I guessed her mood. She's all right, but—she wanted something—bad! To get it—well, if it wasn't I, it would be some one else. At the moment. So—I gave her the money she wanted and—stayed away."

"You stayed away, eh? Why?"

Jimmy blushed.

"Oh, let's say I'm not altogether a fool. I knew that, if I came, she'd discover that she wasn't that sort. Also, if I stayed away long enough, she'd discover the same thing. I think she's discovered it by now. She's had time to think it over. That's all she needed. She thought over the terms with you, and—didn't like them. Well—my terms were a lot worse. If you hadn't jumped in, she'd have come to you."

Landers rose.

"I guess you don't need any kisses on your white forehead, do you, Mr. Ladd? You know where you stand with me. Any time, anywhere, any amount—I guess I'll mosey along over to see Fannie. So long."

This time he didn't walk; he took a taxi. In five minutes he was ringing Fannie's bell, and in twenty seconds more he was facing her.

"Young Ladd's been to see me," he told her. "He's given me the low-down on the deal."

She was a rather woebegone Fannie. She had

warned Baird of Landers' coming and—waited. That night, Jimmy Ladd had told her of what had happened. But she had not heard from Landers.

"I packed, Frankie," she said. "But—you didn't come back."

"I was licked," he said simply. "This guy, Baird —I dunno what was in my mind. I was crazy. Well, if he got you, and then trimmed me, you wouldn't want me back, and—my nerve was all gone, Fannie."

He followed her into the living-room. A trunk, closed and locked, was there. Landers pointed to it.

"When?"

"Soon as you left me, Frankie. I—you know I'm all right, don't you, Frankie?"

"I know you're going to be all right," he said. "Going to forget this foolishness about the stage?"

"Whatever you say, Frankie."

She was pathetic in her meekness. She'd tried to get ahead dishonestly, and—her lover had tried to kill Baird. Shock had driven ambition from her mind. She wanted peace, security, and—Frankie Landers had tried to kill a man because of her. Even though he'd been disarmed and driven away, whipped, he'd tried to kill a man *because of her!* Any man that would go that far on her account must be—well, better a husband like that than a place in front of the chorus.

Landers felt his self-esteem coming back to him.

"Why'd you let me think it was Baird? And if it wasn't Baird, why'd you go to his rooms one night? I want this straight, Fannie."

He was domineering now. She yielded before him, and his meekness—his surprising meekness, since he had failed in his attack on Baird—gave way before her own.

He heard her all through. There was no condemnation in his eyes or his speech at her confession of blackmail. Neither did he upbraid her because she had attempted to "double-cross" him. That was to have been expected. Of course, now that they were to be married, it was different. But on Broadway it is every man for himself, and every woman twice as much so.

"So—that's it?" he said, when she had finished.

He seemed to forget her presence as he went to the telephone and called up Blackmar. He spoke long.

"Get it?" he finished. "We can't *prove* a thing, but—I can make it hot for him. I'm gonna try, anyway."

"Keep out of it," warned Blackmar. "Leave this to me; I can handle it twice as well."

"Well, have it your way," grunted Landers.

He hung up and turned to Fannie.

"Put on your hat and coat," he commanded.

"Where we going?" she asked.

"You'll find out quick enough," he said. "Do as I tell you."

"Frankie?"

"Well?"

"You're going to be—you're going to be—Frankie, you won't——"

His eyes softened.

"Listen, kid: I wouldn't marry you if I didn't love you. And you can go all through the Landers history and you won't find a one of them that ever beat his wife." He kissed her. Then he spoke again. "That minister over Hoboken way'll be in the hay, kid, if we don't hustle. Come on."

XXVII

BAIRD grunted as he turned painfully over in bed. He grinned, too. He was not so very different from the millions of soldiers of whom he had been one a few weeks ago. He believed, without vanity, that, had he been wounded upon the field of battle as slightly as he had been wounded by Landers, he would have tied the arm up with the first-aid kit and continued fighting.

And now here he was occasionally groaning, and fuming and fretting all the time. He was permitting himself to be sent to bed, even took his own temperature. He visualized his future. In about five or six months, he'd wonder if that twinge in his elbow was really rheumatism or not. He'd begin to wear a red-flannel band round his tummy, and he'd massage himself on the chest with pungent, greasy oils wherever he had a bit of a cough. Yes, and he'd probably wear carpet slippers round the house, and sit, huddled up, near the radiator.

His grin became rueful. One can't visualize carpet slippers without visualizing home, and "home" means a woman. Well, he'd quit looking into the future. The only woman in the world had inherited money, and she had disinherited friendships that had been too sudden in the making.

His voice was petulant as he heard a gentle rap on his door.

"Grannan, I don't want a thing, d'y hear? All I want is for you to go off somewhere and die."

"B-r-r-r! Do you *bite*, too?"

He sat bolt upright in bed.

"Eileen!"

Through the door came a gurgle of laughter.

"I don't blame your man for being so reluctant if you always talk to him like that."

"Just a mom—— Eileen, you shouldn't have come here!"

"That's why I came," she answered.

He didn't bother to analyze the remark. He couldn't have. How could he know that Eileen had come here, in defiance of the procedure ordained by society for the guidance of young females, because only by that coming could she do sufficient penance for her doubts? He didn't even know that Jimmy Ladd had been to see her to-night.

The elevator-boy had looked at her oddly when she asked for the floor on which Mr. Baird lived.

"Ladies ain't permitted to call, ma'am," he said.

She colored. She didn't even try to look haughty. She knew perfectly well that, in such a place as Derriby's, nocturnal visits of women are frowned upon. She knew it, but had not bothered to think about it. Swept forward by an emotion bigger than her prejudices, the little narrownesses of convention now served to check that emotion. She would have turned, shamefaced, and fled, but that a smooth voice spoke.

"Never you mind tellin' Miss Baird that she can't call, Kelly," said the voice. "There's rules and exceptions, too; exceptions, Kelly, mind that. Step in, Miss Baird."

She turned to meet the smirking features of the speaker.

"Mr. Baird's been expecting you all day, ma'am," said the man.

She shrank into the lift, and could hardly move her gaze from the smug face of the uniformed servant who spoke to her. But, when they reached the top floor and the elevator had descended, the servant grinned. Also, he winked.

"No use trying to explain things to people like Kelly, ma'am," he said. "My name's Grannan, ma'am. Valet to Mr. Baird. Mr. Baird's room's down this way. When you're leaving, just walk out like you owned the place, miss."

The final "miss" seemed, she felt, to render her *declassée*. She wondered vaguely if Grannan were accustomed to guiding women to Baird's rooms. And then she felt guilty, because she had harbored, even for a second, another evil thought about Baird.

But when she had knocked on the door and had heard Baird's voice, all misgivings as to what she was doing left her. The man on the other side of the door was "mad about her." That was the only important thing in the world. It was sheer agony to wait while Baird unfastened the door.

He opened it at last. About him was drawn a

heavy bath-robe. He had donned it hastily, in wonderment that amounted to bewilderment.

"Eileen! You shouldn't——"

She hesitated on the threshold. His own uncertainty gave her apparent certainty.

"Do you want me to go?" she asked.

His blank expression was answer enough. He stepped aside as she entered the room.

"I should think," she said, as he closed the door, "that you'd say you were glad to see me. Or do you receive visitors so often?"

She was more than flippant; she was cheap—for the moment. But Baird knew the reason, knew that this nonchalance but hid her inner excitement.

"You know that I don't," he told her.

She shrugged. "Your man Grannan didn't seem surprised at my calling."

"My man Grannan is—capable of meeting a situation," he replied lamely. He could not tell her that his man Grannan was keeping him, now that he was confined to his room, under an espionage that, Baird thought, included opening his mail.

"Apparently he is," she said.

"Yes—capable man," said Baird.

"Men make wonderful servants," said Eileen. "Much better than women."

"They surely do," agreed Baird.

He fumbled at his throat with his right hand, drawing his robe closer. The girl looked away from him. She had come upon the impulse of emotion, and—they were discussing the servant question.

The color that had begun to ebb from her cheeks blazed now. She, too, tumbled at her throat, loosening the catch of her heavy coat.

"May I help?" he asked.

He came near to her. The robe fell away from one shoulder and she saw that his left arm was in a sling.

"You poor—Rodney! Jimmy has been to see me to-night. I couldn't wait. He told me how." She pointed at the sling.

Baird jerked the robe's folds together.

"Silly fool, Jimmy! What did he tell you? Might have kept his mouth shut. Can't see any reason why——"

"No? When I was thinking all sorts of things of you? Rodney Baird, that sling is slipping. Let me fix it."

She waved aside his protests. She made him sit down in a chair while she adjusted the loosened sling. It was necessary for her to remove her coat. Her arms, bare to the shoulder, went round his neck while her fingers fumbled at the knot of the sling.

How it happened neither of them could have told five minutes later. Perhaps it was the touch of her smooth, firm forearms against his cheek; perhaps it was a tendril of hair that brushed against his lips; perhaps it was the meeting of their eyes. Anyway, there was an incoherent moment when his right arm went about her, when her lips met his, and her pliant body pressed against him.

She laughed when he released her. The loosened

sling had been forgotten by both. Only, Baird's wince, as she leaned against the wounded arm, reminded her of what she had begun to do.

She laughed. In the laugh were pity, tenderness, the mirthfulness of youth which takes nothing seriously, and the seriousness of maternity which takes most things too seriously. For maternity begins with love, not with marriage.

"I'm afraid that you wouldn't recommend me as a nurse," she said. "Sit *still!* You mustn't! Let me fix——"

He finally let her, even to the patting of the collar of his robe into correct position. Then she waved away his clutching hand and sat down opposite him.

"Rodney Baird, I'm compromised. You know that?"

"Grannan will keep his mouth shut. Besides, he doesn't know you," he told her. He was uneasily conscious that perhaps neither of the statements would hold good.

"Gents what have compromised ladies are confronted by only one honorable course," she said.

He looked at her. Her hair was slightly tumbled. The flush that a glance from him would always cause to rise to her cheeks—until custom banished the thrill it gave her—was in her skin now. It was not a blush; it was the color that comes from a pulse beating above normal.

"Will you marry me, Eileen?" he asked.

She colored; he paled. It was absurd, despite what had just passed, despite her coming down here, that she would really—

"Perhaps, when you've heard what I have to say, you won't want to marry me." He laughed. It was too ridiculous! "Rodney, for the past week I've been thinking— Rodney, that Holben women has no—no reason for——"

Well, he was face to face with it at last. At last? It was only a little over two weeks ago that he had succumbed to temptation. Yet it seemed ages ago.

"None at all," he assured her easily.

"You haven't—— I'm not a girl, Rodney. I'm a woman. If there's anything that——"

"There isn't a thing. She had me mixed up with some one else, Eileen. She thought that she could get money from me. When she discovered that she couldn't——" He shrugged. "There was absolutely no reason in the world why she should think——"

"She said that she could put you in jail."

He smiled.

"I think she's insane."

"It doesn't matter, anyway. What does matter is that I've doubted, distrusted. Jimmy told me tonight about what you'd done for him. Kept quiet about Landers—— Rodney, is there any reason in the world why I shouldn't marry you?"

His lips twisted in a queer crooked smile.

"Except that maybe you don't care enough, Eileen?"

It was incredibly easy. She apparently dismissed Fannie Holben from her mind. Yet, after all, the other things that he had done had been incredibly

EILEEN ROSE
AND DROPPED HIM A
COURTESY

easy. From two hundred a month, he had stepped into two thousand a month. If one had the nerve, and intelligence to back that nerve—

She drew her brows together.

"'Care?' 'Enough?' Do you suppose that anything less than caring *too much* would bring me here at this time? But, Rodney, are you sure that—I've sort of forced a proposal from you, haven't I?"

"You surely have—by your beauty and your charm, my dear."

Eileen rose and dropped him a courtesy. She looked unbelievably young in the simple little white dinner dress.

"Help me on with my coat, Rodney. I—after Jimmy left—I couldn't sleep until I'd—seen you. Oh, Rodney."

The last was a sigh, a sigh of surrender. More than that, it was the sigh of conquest, the long-drawn breath that follows strife. For no woman is married until she has striven both for and against the urge of love. So is surrender conquest, too.

This time, he did not draw her to him savagely. Gently he put his arm about her; placidly, almost, she suffered him to do so. His lips were caressing her hair when a knock upon the door drove them apart.

"Eh? Who is it?" he called.

"Blackmar," came the answer. "Can you see me, Baird?"

Within the room, the two stared at each other. Her lips framed a whispered question: "What does Sam want with you?"

He shook his head. Perspiration moistened the forehead that he fought to free from a frown.

Panic appeared in her eyes. It was all very well to defy convention, but—she didn't want Blackmar to find her here.

"Come around to-morrow," called Baird. "I——"

"'To-morrow!'" Blackmar's voice was fierce. "You'll see me now, Baird, or I'll come back with a search-warrant. Get me?"

Eileen had just yielded herself to Baird's arms. His kisses were fresh upon her lips. Yet in her heart something leaped—something that was neither love nor fear—but suspicion.

"I'll hide in your room," she whispered.

She eluded his clutch. She tiptoed through the doorway that led into the bedroom. The door gently closed behind her.

Baird's shoulders sagged. A few nights ago, to avoid Jimmy Ladd, Fannie Holben had slipped into this same bedroom. It was like a farce, only—it was offensive that Eileen should be coupled, even in thought, with the Holben girl.

But matters of taste could be dismissed. More vital things loomed ahead. What did Blackmar want? What would he say that, overheard by Eileen— Well, she couldn't be fooled long. Sooner or later, she'd have had to know.

He was coldly civil as he opened the door and admitted Blackmar.

XXVIII

FOR once, Blackmar was not immaculate. There was a red line on his forehead, where his hat had been pulled too tightly. His mustache was still the toothbrush sort, but it was a well-worn one, with its bristles straggly. His tie had been hastily knotted and had slipped to one side in the collar, exposing the edge of the gold button. Also, in fastening his waistcoat, he had not taken care that the holes and the buttons matched.

The cool calm that Baird had envied, that air of slight boredom that had been so insufferable, were gone to-night. These things, queerly, had rendered him colorless. Their absence defined him, gave him character. A dozen character-analysts could not have explained so clearly to Baird the reason for Blackmar's success in life as this view of him as he entered the apartment. For, while he gave no particular impression of strength, he did give an impression of energy.

For a moment, Blackmar did not speak. It seemed to Baird that he was striving to regain that poise which was absent to-night.

"Nice place you have here, Baird," he said finally.

Baird carefully unbuttoned the top of his robe. Then he buttoned it again. He leaned against the mantel.

In the next room was Eileen—Eileen, who had just told him that she loved him, had consented to marry him. And here was Blackmar, who, doubtless, would make charges that would damn Baird forever with Eileen. Well, let him!

"Like it?" he asked easily.

Blackmar's mouth lifted at one corner.

"It's rather different from one room in a boarding-house, isn't it?"

"Why? Do you live in a boarding-house?" asked Baird.

"That's excellent repartee," said Blackmar. "But, Baird, you've played the string out."

"Yes? What string?"

"Oh, the string that you thought would lead to God knows what. I'll say one thing for you, Baird: you have ambition."

"That's kind of you," commented Baird. Something instinctively told him not to let his temper get loose. If Blackmar became more angry, so much more advantage might lie with Baird.

"Yes; I think it is. I think it's most decent of me. I ought to call for Derriby, tell him what you are, and have you thrown out of here."

Baird straightened up and faced Blackmar.

"I wouldn't talk too much of throwing out, Blackmar. You might put ideas into my head."

Blackmar laughed.

"It's no use, Baird. I've got the goods on you."

"That's interesting. Would you mind explaining?"

"Are you sure that you want me to? Wouldn't

you prefer to have me say nothing except, maybe, 'Much obliged' when you hand over what belongs to me?"

Baird laughed this time. He hoped that it rang true to the listener in the next room.

"Yes; I want you to. It promises to be interesting."

Blackmar shook his head slowly.

"You know, Baird, I'm tempted to admire you. You have nerve, even if you are a thief."

Baird could, in fancy, hear the gasp that must come from Eileen's throat. He almost staggered beneath the word. It was the word that he had avoided, the word that he had refused to frame, even mentally. For he wasn't a thief. One could be a thief only when one had the intent to steal, and he had never had that. Even now, with the word ringing in his ears, he summoned to his aid those sophistries that had comforted him during the past seventeen days. And, in the next room, Eileen had heard!

His voice sounded odd to himself when he spoke. He knew that his face was pale and that his fingers twitched for Blackmar's throat. But Eileen was in the next room. There must be no open scandal.

"Just explain, please, Blackmar. You've been odd enough in your manner before this. We'll have it out now, if you don't mind. Then I'll have something to say about your choice of words."

"'Have it out now?'" Blackmar's amazement was unfeigned. "Good God, Baird; do you think to bluff it through? Don't you suppose that I *know*?"

"Know what?"

Blackmar stared. Then he smiled contemptuously.

"I should think it would be enough for you that I *know*, but if you want proof—a canvas trunk, containing two hundred and three thousand and some-odd dollars——"

"Why not be exact? This is proof that you're offering, you know." Baird's laugh was exquisitely balanced between amusement and amazement. The end had undoubtedly come. Well, he'd meet it fighting. He'd not concede an inch. He squared his shoulders beneath the bath-robe.

"Two hundred and three thousand and eight hundred dollars, then," said Blackmar. "It was put in your room at the Hotel Tramby early New Year's morning."

"By whom?" demanded Baird.

"Frankie Landers. He meant to put it in another room."

Baird laughed again.

"Well, of course, New Year's morning is New Year's morning. Go on, please. What happened then?"

"I'll get to that," said Blackmar.

"No; let's go back a bit first, if you please. Granting that your friend Landers had a trunk and that the trunk which you claim he had held that money—how did he happen to have it?"

"It was meant for some one else. It was a—payment," said Blackmar. Baird caught his slight hesitation.

"Go ahead," he said.

"You came home. You found that trunk. You put it in your own trunk. A couple of days later, you moved over here, taking the money with you."

"And the trunk?"

"And the trunk," said Blackmar.

"I can assure you that I haven't expressed any trunk away from here. And it isn't here now," challenged Baird.

"I know that well enough. Don't think I'm insinuating that you're a fool, Baird. 'Thief' was the word I used."

"Yes; I heard you the other time," said Baird. "I haven't answered yet, Blackmar."

"No; and I hardly think you will." He tossed his cigarette in the fireplace and lighted another. "Of course the trunk isn't here. But shortly after you moved in here, you left with a bundle. That bundle might have held the broken remains of a trunk. The man who cleaned your rooms discovered splinters of wood on the floor."

"Grannan?" asked Baird.

"Yes."

"So—you made a detective of Grannan. What next?"

"There wasn't much next—until half an hour ago."

"What happened then?"

"Fannie Holben told Frankie Landers all she knew. Baird, it's no use. I know your record. I know what salary you earned in Donchester. I know how much you got for the piece of land you

sold a fortnight ago. And it wasn't enough to pay for the pin that you bought for Miss Elsing."

"Still, I might have had some other money," suggested Baird.

"You might—but you didn't. Where'd you get it?"

"Men have been known to save from their salaries. Mind, I'm not saying that I did. I'm not saying anything. I'm merely asking you if you are sure that I couldn't have had some other money?"

"Sure enough," said Blackmar. "Are you coming through, Baird?"

"And if I don't?"

"I'll go to Ladd."

"Do you think Ladd will believe you?"

Blackmar sneered again.

"I think so. You know, Baird, you're a prepossessing young man and all that, but suppose Ladd asked you to show him some proof of financial responsibility—you wouldn't care for him to do that?"

"'Proof,' eh?" Baird summoned amusement to his eyes. "I thought that *you* were going to advance proof, Blackmar."

Blackmar stared at him. He spoke slowly.

"You're certainly no fool, Baird. You have nerve, but—you know you can't get away with this. And—Landers was willing to pay fifty thousand a couple of weeks ago. I'll pay that now. And—I'll keep still."

It was temptation. Only—Eileen was in the next room. Further, his salary from Jimmy Ladd was

due in two weeks. A few months of that salary, and he could replace the money that he had used, could deny that he had ever touched a penny of it.

To accept a bribe now—even if Eileen were not within hearing—

"Blackmar, if you—or Landers—lost two hundred thousand dollars, why didn't you go to the police?"

"That's our business!" snapped Blackmar. "Baird, better listen. Until I *knew* that you'd taken that money—well, I could wait. Now that I *know*—Baird, you'd better settle. You don't know this man's town. Things happen here. For instance, Derriby's is a rather strict place, you know."

"Well?" Baird felt his forehead grow warm.

"Oh, you have other ambitions than financial. Suppose that you were kicked out of Derriby's in the middle of the night because some light piece were found in your rooms. It would make nice reading in the morning. Miss Elsing might happen to see it."

Baird shook his head slowly.

"Blackmar, you're pretty low."

"How about yourself? Having your mistress in here while you're trying to marry Miss Elsing! A cheap little bookkeeper, four flushing, pretending to have money. *Having* money, but stolen money!"

"All through?" Baird's voice was low.

"'Through?' I haven't begun yet. You took that money——"

"But he says that he didn't take it, Sam."

Wheeling, Blackmar faced Eileen. She was as

white as the dress she wore. She stood in the doorway, one hand upon the knob of the door that she had just opened. For a moment, she stared at Blackmar. Then she turned to Baird.

His heart leaped. Instead of the look of contempt that he had expected, his eyes met a look of faith, of trust.

"I had to come out," she said. "I couldn't stay there and let Sam think—Sam"—she addressed Blackmar—"I've heard every word you've said."

"Then you've heard things that should prevent your making a fool of yourself!" snapped Blackmar.

Her eyes narrowed.

"Sam, if what you say is true—not that Rodney took the money, but that it was put in some hotel room—why was it put there?"

"Does that matter?" countered Blackmar.

"Why haven't you gone to the police? Sam, it doesn't sound good to me."

"Because you have a silly faith in Baird. Because you're deceived by an impostor who——"

"Never mind abuse, Sam. Why haven't you gone to the police?"

"'The police?'" Blackmar was upon the defensive already. "There are reasons, Eileen."

She laughed scornfully.

"They must be imperative reasons, Sam. Two hundred thousand is a lot of money."

For a moment, it seemed that Blackmar would make some hot retort. Then he shrugged.

"I seem to be outvoted, Eileen. You and Baird

together—— I take it, Eileen, that you don't believe me."

"I believe that you have lost money. But that Rodney took it—no!"

"I congratulate you, Baird," said Blackmar. He looked about the room, found his hat where he had placed it upon a chair, picked it up, and walked to the door. "Still—" and he paused on the threshold —"life is a long and uncertain proposition, Baird. Two hundred thousand is a fortune, yes. But—is it worth it? Others beside myself are interested in that fortune. They aren't the meekest men in the world. The next time I see you, Baird, perhaps— Oh, well," he looked at Eileen. "Have I ever lied to you, Eileen?"

"Why, no, Sam."

"Have I ever questioned your motives?"

"No." She was puzzled. Baird grew a little uneasy.

"I don't question them now, Eileen. I know that you've been carried away. That's all right. All of us make mistakes. I don't even care why you're here. But—please, because I never have lied to you, because I have never questioned or doubted you, please do this much for me—wait."

"What do you mean, Sam?"

"I mean, think it over before you marry Baird. Wait. He's a thief. Oh, I can't prove it, but— he's a thief just the same."

"Sam!" She spoke before Baird could. Anger, steely, outraged anger was in the monosyllable.

Blackmar shrugged. He hesitated a moment, then

passed through the door. They heard the ring of the elevator-bell.

"Wait until I dress, Eileen," said Baird. He started for the bedroom. She detained him.

"Think I'd let you out with your bad arm?" she asked.

"You must," he said.

He closed the door of the bedroom behind him. His head whirled. Eileen believed him. Further, Blackmar had exposed the weakness of the claimants to the money. They didn't *dare* go to the police. He was safe.

Another thought came to him: How could he ever return the money now? It would damn him forever to do so. He breathed deeply. Well, why think about returning it? Blackmar couldn't, or wouldn't —it came to the same thing—prove his title.

Always it had been his intention to seek out the rightful owner when he had replaced what portion of it he had used. But now a new, an unexpected angle had obtruded itself upon him. How *could* he return the money? If only Eileen had not overheard!

It did not do to tell himself that he needn't think about returning it. Blackmar's epithet had burned into his spirit. He was *not* a thief! He would *not* keep the money!

It was almost amusing. He was more frightened now at the prospect of being compelled, in self-defence, to retain the money than he had ever been at the prospect of discovery.

But there must be a way out. There *had* to be

a way out. Only—no way out that he could see led also to Eileen. If she knew— But she believed in him. Later, he'd figure— He was not a thief. Circumstances could not make him one.

He thrilled again as he kissed her just before they left. There was trust, faith, in the way her lips clung to his. But her eyes were slightly filmed. She trusted him. He knew that; in the moment of love's acknowledgment she would not question. But by and by— He talked feverishly all the way downstairs to the taxi.

XXIX

ONCE in the machine, he became silent. Eileen was no ordinary girl. She was the product of her day and generation. There still remained in the world, of course, sweet little women who did not read the newspapers, and thought business was so tiresome and woman's place was in the home and all that sort of thing. But Eileen was not that kind. She could love; she could have faith, but love would never make a fool of her—her faith was the sort that requires a basis.

He could, he had no doubt, convince her that Blackmar was in the grip of a most amazing error. But if he began to attempt that convincing before he'd weighed all the evidence as carefully as Eileen would later on weigh it, he'd surely make admissions that would hurt.

But Eileen, just now, was in no mood to analyze the man that she loved, who was "mad about her." At the moment, she had all that she craved: Baird's arm about her shoulders and her head upon his breast. So, like any clerk taking his girl home from the theater, they rode up Fifth Avenue and across Fifty-ninth Street.

Baird would have left her at her apartment. Common sense told him to go. But when did com-

mon sense run better than second when it was opposed to the invitation in a lady's eyes?

He went in with her. The telephone-bell was ringing as they entered, and Eileen, with a muttered hope that Mrs. Kelton would not be awakened, ran down the hall to answer it.

It was Jimmy Ladd.

"Forgive me, old dear," he said. "Hope I didn't wake you."

"You didn't," she told him.

"I called up," said Jimmy, "because I just happened to think that you might know where Baird is. I just went down to see him, and they told me he'd gone out with a lady."

"I'm the lady, sir."

"I thought so. Snappy little scandal on the way, eh? Baird there now?"

"He is."

"Scandal gets more scandalous. Mind my coming up and playing chaperon? Suppose you've kissed and made up and all that. Oh, well, I'd like to see you both."

"Come up," she invited.

"Jimmy's coming," she told Baird, as she entered the living-room.

"Eh? Up here?"

"That's what I said. Jealous?"

"Awfully," he said. He kissed her, her face so close to his she could not note the exultation in his eyes. For, while she had been telephoning, common sense had reasserted itself. The less he saw of

Eileen alone until he had planned his story, the better for him.

For he was in for it—in for it up to his eyes. He wanted her; he wouldn't give her up! It had been necessary to take money that wasn't his own to advance his first acquaintance. It was necessary to lie to further that acquaintance until it was marriage. Well, he hadn't balked at the first; he'd not balk at the second.

But, to his relief, she asked no questions. She sat beside him, carefully arranging a cushion against his crippled arm, and let herself relax. It was sweet, leaning against him, letting his strength become her own. Blackmar and the scene in which he had just enacted a prominent part faded out of her consciousness. She did not even bother to wonder why Jimmy Ladd, who had dined with her this evening, should wish to call again. Yet she knew Jimmy well enough to know that when he was apparently most nonchalant, he was in reality most serious. His conversation over the telephone would ordinarily have aroused her curiosity. But not to-night. She was too completely under the sway of Baird's personality.

She jumped up as the door-bell rang. She exclaimed with dismay lest her sudden start had hurt Baird's wounded arm. She kissed him again. Then, patting her hair into place, she went down the hall and opened the door. Jimmy entered silently. He spoke no word until, his hat and coat hung up, he reached the living-room. Then, feet wide apart, he stood before the gaslog and surveyed them.

"Well, it's all settled, I perceive. My warm felicitations, children. Baird's the second-best match you could have made, Eileen."

"The first being?" she laughed.

"James McPherson Ladd, junior, at your service, ma'am. Oh, well, if I won't do as a husband, I'll make a fine godfather."

"Jimmy!" But it did no good to be shocked. Jimmy merely grinned.

"I can see myself dousing the young 'un in the font—that what they use? Yes, font. Little James Ladd Baird!"

"Jimmy, go home," said Eileen.

"I'll stop it," he said. He held out his hand to Baird. "Some rapid worker, feller. Well, you deserve her."

The pressure of his fingers was like a tightening coil of circumstance. This further evidence of Jimmy's friendship, this warm congratulation, made it but the harder to confess—made it impossible!

"Thanks, Jimmy," he muttered.

"And don't I get any congratulation?" demanded Eileen.

Jimmy laughed.

"That's the woman of it. All vanity."

"'Vanity?' I think it is modest of me," said Eileen.

Ladd laughed again.

"You women are funny, Eileen. It isn't sufficiently flattering to your vanity that the man should be complimented because he has been lucky enough to win such a feminine prize; the woman wants to be

congratulated because her attractions were great enough to land so desirable a husband."

"Not much logic to that remark," sniffed Eileen.

Jimmy pondered a moment.

"Well, perhaps there isn't. Think it over, though." He turned to Baird. "Time you were in bed, feller. Fine wife you'll make, Eileen—letting a sick man out this way!"

"I couldn't help it," she excused. "He insisted."

"Well, I'll do a little insisting, then. I knew blamed well that if Baird were here, he'd stick around until morning. You two idiots—— The *convenances* mean darned little to you two love-birds, don't they? You, Eileen, going to Baird's rooms, and bringing Baird home—— It's late; come on, Rod."

Considerately he walked down the hall while the couple bade each other good-by.

Outside, he gave the address to the taximan who had been waiting for him. He held the door for Baird. He was suddenly taciturn. Baird welcomed the mood. He was tired. His wound was a scratch, but it *did* ache a little, and reaction from excitement and strain set in.

He was sleepy when they reached his rooms. Jimmy went along up-stairs with him.

"Mind if I stick round long enough for a smoke?" he asked.

"Tickled to death," said Baird.

Jimmy lighted a cigarette. He slumped down in a chair and idly watched Baird as the latter divested himself of his outer clothing. His eyes were half

closed when, pajama-clad, Baird came back from the bedroom.

"It's a funny world," said Jimmy.

"Yes?"

"Uh-huh. Queer things. Oh, you'll hear about it sooner or later. I thought I ought to tell Eileen, but I couldn't. You'll have to." Baird stared at him, his mouth open. "Blackmar shot himself tonight."

The air almost whistled through Baird's lips, so heavy was his exhalation. He could not speak, could only look the question.

"At the Graduates. I strolled in there and heard all about it. Aimed for his heart."

"Dead?" Baird whispered the question.

Ladd shook his head.

"No; not seriously hurt at all. A steward got the gun from him before he could try a second shot. Bullet glanced off his ribs. It'll be all over town tomorrow. Hope it keeps out of the papers. It will ruin Blackmar."

"He—— Where is he?" asked Baird. That is, his lips asked the question; his mind framed a score of others, framed a hundred excuses, defenses, which, however, he had sense enough not to utter.

"At the club. Oh, he's O.K. Asleep when I left there. Unless the club servants talk, there'll be no public scandal."

"Do you know—why?" asked Baird.

Jimmy eyed him.

"Good Lord, I should think you'd know!"

"I? Why?"

Jimmy shrugged.

"You've got the girl he wants."

Baird breathed again.

"You think that——"

"What else could it be? That's the only thing that's been on Sam's soul so far as I know." He tossed away his cigarette. "That's why I wanted to get hold of you and Eileen quickly. Blackmar came to his senses as soon as the steward had yanked the gun away from him. He vows it was an accident. But if Eileen's engagement should be announced, there'd never be a chance in the world of hushing it up. Too many people know that he was in love with her, almost engaged to her. So, break it to her in the morning."

Baird merely stared. He had been reprieved again. He had supposed that the money in the canvas trunk might have had something to do with Blackmar's act.

"Blackmar sure had it in for you," said Jimmy.

"Why?" Again Baird felt an almost physical shock.

"Did he mention me after——"

"No, of course not. Sam's a gentleman, whatever else he may be. Certainly not. But he'd said something to Eileen about you. I bawled her out for paying any attention to it. In fact, feller, if you're handing out any credit for your early engagement, don't overlook James McPherson Ladd, junior. She'd never have come down here to-night if I hadn't put the idea into her head. I told her exactly the sort you were. Oh, she knew it! She'd

have sent for you sooner or later, but a bliss deferred is a bliss deferred. Say, 'Thank you,' Rod."

"You know I do," said Baird.

"Well, you're a lucky pup," said Jimmy. "Eileen is the best. Poor Sam! She didn't use him quite right. Oh, don't take offense when there's none meant. Eileen is human and a woman. Women have no conscience about men. They use 'em, and—throw 'em away. God bless 'em. I hope they all run true to form and throw me away." He chuckled cheerfully. "I'm destined to be an old bachelor, Rod. For about five years you're going to have pity for me. Then, one day, when you see me with a flock of chickens gathered round, you're going to wonder. Oh, you'll be happy. No question about that. Eileen is a wonder, best there is. But—you're going to wonder. You wouldn't trade places with me for anything. You'll have Eileen and the kiddies let's hope—and home life and everything. But me for bachelorhood. Isn't Blackmar a fool?" he demanded suddenly.

Baird made no reply.

"I'll say he is," went on Jimmy. "My Lord, the world is full of wonderful girls!" He shrugged. "I suppose, though, Blackmar's getting old. His vision fails. He can only see one person. Now, me—I can see a million. Well, I've kept you up long enough. See Eileen in the morning and—just tell her about Sam. Poor devil! So long, Rod!"

He was abruptly gone. Baird sat down on the edge of his bed. He put the chain of events together. It was not his fault that Eileen preferred

him to Blackmar. How could he be responsible for Blackmar's attempted suicide?

But the answer came clearly. If he hadn't taken that money, he'd never have continued his acquaintance with Eileen, would never have been able to win her. And if he hadn't won her, Blackmar would not have tried to kill himself.

To kill himself! He suddenly blanched. If Blackmar had died, his death would have been on Baird's conscience. And it was Blackmar's money that he had taken. At least, Blackmar claimed some title to it.

Suppose—suppose Jimmy was wrong! Suppose Blackmar had killed himself—*tried* to kill himself; he mustn't exaggerate, mustn't be morbid—because of that money.

Impossible! Blackmar was said to be worth eight millions. *Said* to be. But he, Rodney Baird, knew how easy it was to build up a false financial reputation in New York. It was hard in Donchester—there everyone knew the other fellow's business—but here, in Manhattan, where no one knew or cared so long as you wore good clothes and paid your share— Suppose that this money had been vital to Blackmar?

Then—then there wouldn't be any question about it. He'd be responsible for the firing of the bullet into Blackmar's body— He mustn't be an ass. Blackmar was weak, and he could not be blamed for Blackmar's weakness.

He rose and poured himself some of the medicine that the doctor had left with him. He drank it.

It was a mild narcotic, and it stilled his fancies. Stilled them, but left them with him. He saw Donchester—no; he couldn't go back there. But he saw himself in some similar town, working at a desk, on a high stool. He saw Eileen— He couldn't do it. Blackmar was weak. The world belonged to the strong. He was strong. It hadn't been weakness —that first step of his; it had been strength. He kept repeating the statement to himself until he fell asleep.

XXX

BEFORE going to sleep that night, Baird had finally persuaded himself that his actions were based upon strength of character. He knew better in the morning and, knowing better, there was but one thing to do.

Blackmar *might* have attempted suicide because of Eileen. The world, that portion of it which knew Blackmar and Eileen, would assume so. Blackmar had made his last throw. He had charged Baird directly with having committed theft. Then—attempted self-destruction and—silence.

The game was over, unless Baird chose to renew it. Blackmar, Fannie Holben, Frankie Landers—there was no more to fear from these. They could prove nothing. The money that he had found in the canvas trunk in his room in the Tramby was his, if he chose to take it.

With the game entirely in his hand, he bathed, shaved with fussy care, arrayed himself carefully, ate breakfast, read in the newspapers about the progress of peace, and took a taxi to the Graduates.

There was some difficulty about seeing Blackmar. The club employees were suspicious of strangers; but he finally persuaded them to send his name up to Blackmar. Three minutes later he was in Blackmar's room.

There, upon the bed, pale, wan, was a Blackmar different from the exquisite whom Baird had known. Even the faint sneer that he managed to summon to his bloodless lips held but a feeble imitation of that arrogance which had annoyed Baird when first they had met.

"Come to gloat, eh?" Blackmar asked faintly.

Baird sat down on a chair close to the bed. Now that the moment of decision had come, it was not easy to make it. The weakness of his adversary disarmed him.

"That's nonsense, Blackmar," he said shortly. Blackmar eyed him.

"I suppose it is. What is the idea, then?" he said. Baird looked at him almost blankly.

"Why, to return your money to you, of course," he answered. Decision was made at last. Blackmar's head slipped back on the pillow.

"What's the idea, Baird?" he demanded. Baird shrugged. He essayed a smile.

"There's a limit to everything, I suppose, Blackmar. If my—if what I've done has driven you to—this——" Blackmar's eyes narrowed.

"I understood that my—er—foolishness was generally attributed to a woman." Baird nodded.

"I suppose so. Jimmy Ladd thought so, but—you see, I knew of other matters." Blackmar's lips curled unpleasantly.

"And being afraid that the corner was getting tight, you've come running for immunity, eh?"

Baird frowned.

"I don't think I'd thought of that."

"You don't think so?" Blackmar sneered. Baird shook his head.

"Why—no. You see—it's this way: I saw a chance to—do the things I wanted to do. I took the chance. But when it comes to some one's trying to kill himself—why, that's different." His manner became suddenly businesslike, almost brisk. "You'll have to wait for some of it. I've used it. But—most of it—about two hundred thousand of it, you'll find in here."

He handed Blackmar the storage-warehouse receipt for the suitcase in which the money now reposed. Blackmar fingered it carelessly, not looking at it.

"I suppose you know that restitution, even complete restitution, doesn't nullify criminality." Baird shook his head slowly.

"I don't think you get me, Blackmar. I'm not trying to avoid anything except——" He paused.

"Except what?" demanded Blackmar.

"Well—er—this." He made no gesture, but his eyes swept the bed. Red flushed Blackmar's pale cheeks.

"You needn't worry, Baird," he said. "I—a man does—we're all yellow. It crops out in—different ways. Mine cropped out last night. It's over."

"I'm glad," said Baird. He rose. "I guess that's all, Blackmar. The money that I've—used——"

"Why not say *stolen?*" interrupted Blackmar. Baird nodded.

"The money that I've stolen, then—I can't pay it

back now. You'll get it sometime." He moved toward the door.

"Sit down!" snapped Blackmar. Anger—the first—flashed in Baird's eyes.

"You needn't give orders, you know, Blackmar. Let the police do that. They can find me."

"Wait a bit. Who mentioned police?" Baird shrugged.

"They naturally follow, don't they?"

"Sit down," said Blackmar again. His tone was that of a request now. Baird sat down.

"Do you mean to tell me that——" Blackmar stopped. He began again. "How'd you know it was money that made me try what I tried last night?"

"You're hardly the sort to kill yourself for love," said Baird.

Blackmar colored again. His laugh was self-contemptuous.

"I'd be a more admirable sort if I were," he said. "But—you're right. No woman plays that big a part for me. You're different." Baird shrugged. Blackmar studied him. "You don't seem worried about prosecution," he said. There was something of exasperation in Baird's tone as he replied:

"I'm not worried at all, Blackmar. Please understand that. I wanted something. I took the first way that presented itself to get that something. It turns out that the way holds unpleasantness that can't be offset by the pleasantness of the goal. That's all."

"*Noblesse oblige*, eh?"

"Hardly that."

"No? I rather think that it is, Baird, I—well, let it go that I'm much obliged. You needn't worry about the few thousand that are gone."

"I'll pay it back sometime," said Baird. Blackmar shrugged.

"Suit yourself. I suppose you understand that there'll be no prosecution." Baird stood silent, his face expressionless.

"That's decent of you, Blackmar." The man in the bed laughed.

"Decent, eh? Don't thank me, Baird. The—er—circumstances are such that publicity wouldn't do at all. I'll be honest with you. That money was intended for——"

"It really doesn't matter," said Baird.

"Oh, but it does!" protested Blackmar. "One politician was to get two hundred thousand. The balance was to go to his retainers. A transaction matter——"

"Why tell me?" asked Baird.

"Why?" Blackmar propped himself up on the bed. "Because it isn't worth while, Baird. I knew it a minute—a tenth of a second, after I'd pressed the trigger. Thank God it wasn't too late! But I don't want you leaving here and spilling your brains all over the pavement." Baird laughed.

"I hadn't the slightest idea of——"

"Maybe not this minute. But by and by—— Forget it. Drive it out of your mind. Money? I was worth millions last fall. I wanted more millions. I took a long chance, and the armistice broke me. I kept it as quiet as I could, but because I was crazy

to recoup, I let myself in for certain work that a traction group wanted done. I agreed to handle the money. I did, through Landers. He'd been drinking. It didn't reach the right people. I've been accused of stealing it. It looked to me that I couldn't get it back. I tried to avoid disgrace in the eyes of a bunch of bribers. Now you probably think that the easiest way out is the way that I tried. But it isn't. I wouldn't undergo the horror of thinking that I'd lost my last chance to redeem myself." He wiped his forehead. "We win redemption here, Baird. I learned that as I pressed the trigger last night. Debts must be paid. If we don't pay them here, we're going to be compelled to pay them elsewhere. That's all."

Baird looked down at him. It was decent of Blackmar to tell him all this, but unnecessary. He hadn't the least idea of killing himself. But was he sure? He hadn't had the least idea of taking money that didn't belong to him. But he'd done it.

It was very decent of Blackmar. So he told himself after he'd left the wounded man's bedside. For, outside in the street, it came to him forcibly that he might, conceivably, have tried Blackmar's way out of difficulty. He wouldn't now, because the thing meant weakness; and weakness—he'd been weak enough.

It was wonderful upon Fifth Avenue. Wealth, luxury were on every hand. The things for which he had surrendered the principles that centuries of rigid ancestors had given him were here to-day, as

tempting, as desirable as they had been little over a fortnight ago.

More tempting, more desirable! For he had tasted of them now. All the things that the Avenue typified he had had in his reach. And he had surrendered them. Oh, well—he'd wave a last good-by kiss to the Avenue, as Jimmy Ladd had done to Broadway, and—Jimmy Ladd! Eileen!

They must be told. He had stripped away his false pretenses to Blackmar. Now he must strip them away before Jimmy and Eileen. He turned down a side street and walked, unseeingly, up and down the crowded sidewalks. He couldn't just disappear. Neither could he, with his own lips, frame confession for the ears of Jimmy and Eileen. He could write it, though.

He breathed deeply. Yes; he'd write it and disappear. He straightened up and he noted his surroundings. There, opposite him, was the mansion of James McPherson Ladd. A sudden impulse swayed him. Jimmy was undoubtedly at the office, but his father— He wouldn't write it; he'd tell Mr. Ladd. Ladd, senior, was, after all, the one who'd given him employment. He'd tell him, take his medicine, and then— But he refused to anticipate.

The inside of his hat, where it toughed his forehead, was, he noticed, dripping with perspiration as he handed it to the servant to whom he gave his name and who told him that he would see if Mr. Ladd was at home.

XXXI

JIMMY'S father received Baird in his den. A silk jacket, gorgeously embroidered, covered his shoulders, a bit shrunken, it seemed, since Baird had last seen him.

The old gentleman waved a friendly hand. But its pressure, when Baird took it in his own, was none too strong.

"This is fine of you looking me up, Baird," he said. "Jimmy told you I'd been under the weather a trifle?"

"Why—er—I was passing by——" Ladd seemed not to notice the interruption.

"Been under the weather yourself a bit, haven't you?" Baird colored. Unconsciously he moved his wounded shoulder. "About," the old man spoke measuredly, "as decent a thing as has come to my notice in a long, long time. I won't embarrass you, Mr. Baird. Just let me say 'Thank you!' Jimmy made no mistake about you. It took not merely courage to handle that man Landers, but a quick and ready tact. Jimmy made no mistake," he repeated emphatically. "How's the business appeal to you?" he demanded.

It was hard, much harder even than he had expected. To meet with commendation, with gratitude, when one has come to make confession—

"It—it's been the greatest chance of my life, Mr. Ladd," he said. "I—am grateful."

"Grateful nothing!" snorted the old man. "I'm grateful to you." He grinned. "That quixotic son of mine! Oh, well, it's his very recklessness that makes him lovable. And you'll have a tendency to sober him. You're more conservative." He shifted abruptly from the subject. "Once more, Mr. Ladd, let me thank you. . . . Jimmy has told me all about it, and——" He reached, from the depths of the chair in which he seemed, oddly, so small, his thin hand.

Baird looked at it. He could not shake it again.

"Mr. Ladd," he said steadily, "Jimmy telephoned me New Year's eve. He invited me to a party. I went. I met——" He stopped quickly. Eileen was in no way to blame for what he had done. Her name would not be mentioned. "I went back to my room at the Tramby—broke. Next morning I found, under my bed, a trunk. It was filled with money. Something over two hundred thousand dollars. I took a hundred of it to pay Jimmy money that I'd borrowed. Then, for other purposes, I took several thousand. I moved from the Tramby. I got rid of the trunk in which the money had been. I put the bulk of the money in a suitcase and stored it in a warehouse."

He had been looking down. Now, as he glanced up, he was amazed to find that upon the face of his auditor was no condemnation.

"Go on; go on," commanded Mr. Ladd. Baird drew in a long breath.

"That's about all. Except that to-day I turned over the warehouse receipt to the man who held the best claim to the money, promised to repay what I had spent—stolen," he corrected himself, "whenever I may be able,—and came to tell you."

"Jimmy know?" asked the old man. Baird shook his head.

"I don't want to tell him, Mr. Ladd. I can't. So I thought you'd say good-by to him for me, tell what I've told you——"

"To whom did you give the warehouse receipt? Who's the man that owns the money?" Baird shrugged.

"It doesn't matter much, does it, Mr. Ladd?"

"Matter! I would say it does. I want to know the best way to keep his mouth shut."

"His mouth shut?" Baird's astonishment was palpable.

"Of course. You don't suppose we want any scandal about an employee of Ladd & Company, do you?" The old gentleman fairly bristled at the thought.

"Sam Blackmar," said Baird. The old gentleman pursed his lips.

"I know a few ways to stop his talk. Well, who else?" Baird shrugged.

"It's out of the question, Mr. Ladd. Too many people know of the money's loss——"

"Blackmar tried to kill himself last night, didn't he? He won't have talked to many people. He can be quieted all right. Don't let that worry you. But how did the money get into your room?"

Baird looked at him searchingly. Still there was nothing of condemnation in Ladd's eyes. On the contrary, there was a sympathetic encouragement. Almost before he knew it, he was launched on the full story. Finished, finally he stared down at the floor. There was a moment of silence, broken by a chuckle. He glanced up.

"Eileen is deadly," said the old man. "Her mother, bless her memory, was the same." Baird stiffened.

"Maybe I've said more than I meant, sir. Miss Elsing is in no way responsible. I'd have done the same thing if I hadn't met her."

"Have you told her?" demanded Ladd suddenly. Baird's face blazed. He shook his head.

"I can't do that, sir," he said.

"No?" The old man's voice was suddenly crisp. "Why not?"

"It'd be a bit too much," he protested.

"Too much what? Punishment? You stole, didn't you?" Crispness had become harshness. Yet there was nothing that Baird could say. His head dropped lower. "Some men," went on the old man, "go to jail for theft. Yet you won't tell the girl you intended to marry, Jimmy told me about your engagement only last night, you won't tell her, haven't the courage to tell her what you've done. Seems to me that, inasmuch as there doesn't seem any prospect of jail, you're getting off rather lightly, aren't you?"

"I suppose so, Mr. Ladd."

"H'm." Ladd eyed him closely. "Did you know

that there was no danger of jail when you confessed to Blackmar?"

"I hadn't thought much about it," said Baird.

"I didn't suppose that you had," commented Ladd. The harshness suddenly left his tone. "You came to me because you thought it might be easier, eh?"

Baird assented, rather miserable of tone.

"And just now I jumped down your throat, eh? But a moment before, I didn't seem very upset, eh? Don't understand it? Well, there's only one way to come clean, my boy. Some one said it a long time ago. Confession is good for the soul. Eileen *must* know."

"After I've gone—yes," admitted Baird.

"Gone where?" Baird threw his hands apart.

"Anywhere—out of New York."

"Ladd & Company has no branch offices," said the old man. "You mean, I take it, that you're leaving us?"

Baird stared at him in bewilderment. He was a most incomprehensible old man. One minute, he seemed actually amused by Baird's recital; the next vitriolically angry; the next—but Baird couldn't define . . . this third mood.

"Why, of course," he answered.

"Mind handing me that cigar-box?"

Baird had not realized how nervous he was until he complied with the request. For his fingers could hardly grip the polished lacquered box.

The old gentleman selected a cigar, clipped its end with a gold cutter attached to his watch-chain,

lighted it, and drew in its fragrance lustily. He offered the box to Baird, who declined. The old man chuckled.

"Bad for me; fatal, the doctor told me the other day. Asses, doctors! Always blaming one's troubles on tobacco or liquor. Don't smoke; it'll make you nervous, says my doctor. Lord! Not smoking will make me twice as nervous." He contemplated his cigar a moment. "So you're leaving Ladd & Company. Let's discuss it. Let's analyze it, by way of getting to the root of our difficulties. For, after all, as the head of Ladd & Company, I'm to be considered, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Baird.

"Well then; you come in here and spring a tale of Arabian Nights quality, and I don't seem shocked at your confession. Then I do become angry because you are avoiding your duty to Eileen, which is to confess to her. Seems as if I make acknowledgment of wrong-doing as important as the wrong-doing itself. Well, I do. It's more important.

"You stole some money. You spent it. You intended—well, never mind your intentions. You did it for reasons that seemed good and sufficient to you at the time. It doesn't matter what the reasons were. They satisfied you.

"Well, the man whose money you stole tried to kill himself. You were safe. Nothing could be proved against you. But you went to him and confessed. As nearly as I can make out, the penalties of confession were not considered by you.

"Then you come to me. You want Jimmy and

Eileen to know, but you don't want to tell them yourself. Now, Baird, I'm getting old. I've lived long enough to be able to suspend final judgment on anything that anyone does. It is wrong for a man to steal bread in New York. But if he were shipwrecked upon a desert island and came upon an empty shack in which there was bread, he would not be a thief if he took it and ate it.

"I'm not defending what you've done. I'm defending myself, though, for not condemning you. Balance—that's the law of life. If one steals, one must expiate. Expiation is in different ways. For some it means jail; for others—— You took money that was not yours because you wanted to shine in the eyes of a girl, because you wanted to land a position with my firm.

"Well, in confessing, when there was no compulsion to confess, you struck the balance essential in this world. You returned the money—most of it; you will return the rest. You gave up your position; you gave up the girl you had won. In other words, you restored the balance that had existed before you stole. What more can be asked of you?"

"You ask more," said Baird. "You want me to tell Eileen." The old gentleman shrugged.

"Because I want her to have her chance."

"Her chance?" Baird's mouth remained open.

"Exactly. You've asked her to marry you. She's accepted your offer. Yet you propose running away from her——"

"Good God," cried Baird, "I'm a *thief!* Do you

suppose that she'd look at me again? Why, I'm saving her sorrow, humiliation!"

"Aren't you saving it for yourself, rather?" countered Ladd.

Baird's face whitened. He rose and looked down upon the old man.

"I can't tell you, Mr. Ladd, how—how—you're the whitest man I've ever known. You're—you're Jimmy's dad, all right. But—good-by, Mr. Ladd."

Blindly he rushed down the stairs, took his hat from the amazed servant who had watched his hasty descent, and fairly fled into the street. Old man Ladd was the whitest, the most decent man that ever breathed. But he, Baird, must not be misled by the kindness of one individual. Jimmy would despise him, and Eileen would hate him. It was right that they should.

Until now, he had not felt remorse. He had done what he felt that common decency compelled him to do. But that very recognition of the demands of common decency made him realize that he had outraged common decency before he had yielded to its demands. He was in no mood to palliate his offense. He no longer, in his thoughts, said "took." He said "stole."

He had reached his rooms at Derriby's and had begun packing just about the time that Ladd, senior, located his son on the telephone. Jimmy was with Eileen at her apartment. They promised to come right down to the Ladd mansion.

XXXII

JIMMY raced up-stairs ahead of Eileen. She entered to find the young man seated on the arm of the chair in which the elder sat, his hand gripping the shrunken shoulder. She hid the expression of relief that leaped to her face by turning away.

On receipt of his father's telephone-call, Jimmy had become alarmed. Old man Ladd was the sort who rarely make requests of their friends or family, are never urgent, much less imperative. But he . . . imperative, and Jimmy could only think of his father's health as a reason for the summoning of Eileen, as well as himself, immediately to the Ladd home.

Eileen's face was inquiringly friendly as she returned the old gentleman's greeting.

"Just like you, Mr. Ladd," she said, impudently. "Always trying to keep me from capturing Jimmy. I had him cornered in my apartment, a proposal on the tip of his tongue——" The old gentleman chuckled.

"Eileen, Eileen! When your granddaughter introduces you to her *fiancé*, I wonder will you flirt with him." He turned his head and glanced up at the smiling face of his son. "Tell me," he said, with mock severity, "what were you doing at Eileen's

apartment? Trying to break her engagement?" Jimmy laughed. Then he sobered.

"Talking over Sam Blackmar. Eileen heard about it this morning and she 'phoned me."

"Why not 'phone Baird? Why try to intrigue my only son and heir, Eileen Elsing?" demanded Ladd.

"Rod wasn't in. And, anyway——" Eileen paused, flushing. The old man nodded.

"Of course, Baird was here this morning," he said abruptly. "He told me an amazing story."

Eileen glanced at Jimmy. The young man's face was suddenly harsh.

"An amazing story?" she echoed.

"Yes; that's why I sent for you two. Baird confessed to me that he was a thief."

He kept his eyes fastened upon Eileen. Though her eyes did not move, he knew that she didn't see him, could guess the film that crept over her eyes. Her hand moved mechanically to her throat and pressed against it. It was as though she were having difficulty in swallowing and were assisting the throat-muscles. Yet she was first to break the silence.

"A thief, Mr. Ladd? You mean—Sam Blackmar?" Ladd, senior's, eyebrows lifted.

"You knew something about it, Eileen?"

"Knew something?—I'd heard Sam say that. I don't believe it," she cried. The film seemed to leave her eyes; certainly they blazed now. The vagueness left her voice. "It's a lie." Mr. Ladd shrugged.

"Don't you want to hear me through?"

Her figure stiffened. She looked like a figure of Wrath. Her chin, in its forward jutting, the suddenly tight line of the skin over the jaw-bone, the slight flare of her nostrils—this was an Eileen Elsing different from the Eileen that Jimmy had known. Her eyes gleamed admiringly. Then he turned upon his father.

"It's a bit thick, dad. Perhaps Rod has done something that you don't approve, but——"

"He accused himself of stealing," said Ladd, senior, tersely. "Want to hear about it, Eileen?"

"I'd rather hear it from him," she answered. There was scorn in her tone, but it was for Mr. Ladd, not for the absent Baird. The old man smiled queerly.

"Not much chance of that, my dear, I'm sorry to say. It was because he was afraid to confess to you that he came to me."

This was the first convincing statement,—to Eileen's way of thinking,—that Ladd had made. Red had crept into her pale cheeks, but it crept out now. The combativeness left her eyes, her jaws, her mouth.

"What did he steal?" she demanded. She tried to make her voice retain the scorn that had been in it a moment ago. But that scorn had been natural then. Now it was forced, failed of effect, rendered her tone harsh instead of cynical, doubting, disbelieving.

"Something over two hundred thousand dollars," said the old man.

"From whom?" she asked.

"Sam Blackmar."

"Where?"

"The Tramby Hotel on New Year's eve." She essayed a sniff. It sounded more like a sob.

"You've been listening to Sam," she scoffed. The old man shrugged.

"Blackmar's in bed to-day, isn't he? I haven't seen him. My dear, why should I lie to you?"

She looked at him. He could see the tears slipping down her cheeks, great drops.

"B-bec-cause everybody—be-c-cause h——" It was true. There was no question about it. Rodney had been here this morning, *had* confessed to the old man, and—her tears vanished as quickly as they had come, only telltale streaks on her cheeks and a redness of the eyelids indicating their passage. Into her eyes came that glint of hardness that Jimmy Ladd had often seen in the past. "Tell me," she said.

Slowly, looking anywhere but at her, the old gentleman repeated Baird's confession of an hour or so ago. Silently she heard him through, seeming impatient of Jimmy's frequent exclamatory and amazed interruptions. Her mouth, which had been pugnacious, then pitiful, became almost sneering.

"It's an Elsing trick; we all do it," she said, as the old man finished.

Jimmy had left the arm of his father's chair. Now he stopped his excited walking-up-and-down the floor to gaze at her.

"An Elsing trick?" he asked.

"Making a mess of things," she explained. "Fall-

ing in love with the wrong sort—oh, I was in love with him all right." Her voice was self-contemptuous now.

"Was?" questioned Mr. Ladd gently. She stared at him, mouth agape.

"You don't suppose that I *am*, do you?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Ladd. Jimmy shook his head impatiently.

"That's nonsense, dad."

"Why nonsense, oh, son of mine grown old in wisdom?"

"Why, hang it all, dad, Baird's a crook! Eileen can feel sorry for him—I do, for that matter. But, beyond that—certainly not."

"So?" The father's tone was mild. "Seems to me I have a sort of recollection of a young blackguard who used to fall up-stairs here two or three times a week. He was by way of being a promising young drunkard. I'd hardly call him a drunkard to-day. If I'd ceased to love him while he was drinking, I'm quite sure that his present condition of sobriety would have revived my affection for him." Jimmy flushed.

"It's a bit different, dad. A thief is—well, he's a *thief*."

"Is a child with scarlet fever a child with scarlet fever after the child is pronounced well?" countered his father.

"Who pronounces a crook healed of his crookedness?" demanded Jimmy.

"Why, I'd say that when he renounces the profit that he has made by crookedness, when he's re-

nounced it when he was not compelled to—— I'd say that he was healed then. Wouldn't you?"

"Well, even if I agreed with you, you'd hardly expect Eileen to do so, would you?"

"Never mind Eileen just now. I'm talking to you. Baird did a rather decent thing for you the other day, didn't he?"

"He did," admitted Jimmy.

"Hardly the action of a crook, was it?" asked the old man.

"W-ell." Jimmy shrugged. "You said yourself, a while ago, that Baird was a thief."

"Did I? Didn't I say, rather, that Baird had said that he was a thief?"

"Well, what's the difference?" asked his son.

"Tremendous. If you can't see it—Baird has passed his own judgment upon himself. But I—I hesitate to pass judgment upon anyone."

"You can accept his judgment, though," said Jimmy.

"His verbal judgment, or the judgment of his actions?"

"Aren't they the same thing?"

"Not quite. He calls himself a thief. Then he does the very things that a thief does not do. Impelled by no fear, he makes restitution and confession."

"Are you sure that he wasn't afraid?" demanded Jimmy.

For the first time in many minutes, Eileen spoke.

"He wasn't afraid," she said slowly. "I heard him talk with Sam. He—he wasn't afraid."

"Of course not!" exclaimed the elder Ladd. "It simply happened that the thing he had done led him into a situation that was unendurable. Blackmar had tried to kill himself. Baird guessed why. And he confessed to Blackmar and repaid him—not all, but practically all." Reluctantly Jimmy spoke.

"Game of him, I'll admit."

"Oh something more than that," insisted his father. "Honest of him. Blackmar could prove nothing."

"Honest? Depends, I'd say, on what honesty is," objected Jimmy.

"Who knows exactly? Pilate asked, 'What is truth?' I'd say it was honesty. But, then, I'm older than you are, Jimmy."

"What difference does that make?" asked Jimmy resentfully.

"You'll know soon enough," replied his father.

"I'd like to know now," said Jimmy.

"It's nothing much. Only—things seem so certain when one is young, Jimmy. Two and two make four. We can prove it so easily that we jeer at whoever denies it. It is only when we are old that we ask, 'But how do we know that two is two?' And when we've asked that question, it occurs to us that perhaps the answer to the sum of two and two may be wrong because two isn't two."

"It sounds jumbled to me, dad," said Jimmy. His father shrugged.

"Life becomes jumbled the more we live, Jimmy. It's all so clear to youth. There are the rules. Obey them. Simple, eh? Yet, later, one asks not

merely what and why are the rules and whence their origin but—what is obedience? So we suspend judgment, Jimmy."

"Judgment—in other words, our opinions can be matters of such reasoning as yours, dad?" His father laughed.

"Why not?"

"Well, there's a certain natural abhorrence toward certain things, dad. Such as, for instance, theft."

"And there's a certain admiration that arises in us for another's good qualities. Is that overcome by reasoning?"

"God knows," said Jimmy. "You're way beyond my depth, dad." His father laughed again.

"Well, it made good talk, anyway. And we grow garrulous as we grow older. I suppose you're both well out of the acquaintance. A nasty little rotter, the man is."

"Oh, I don't know where you get that idea, dad," protested Jimmy. "There are lots worse than Rod. Why, hang it, just now you were trying to convince me that Rod was O.K."

"Oh, I was rambling along for the sake of hearing myself talk. A nasty little confidence man. I suspected him from the start. He was too easy, too debonair, too suave——"

"Suave?" The color had come to Eileen's cheeks. "Suave? I don't see how you got that opinion of Rodney. Suavity is the last quality I'd attribute to him. He—he was sort of ingenuous, I think."

"A pose. Part of his crookedness," said old man Ladd.

"Why, I think you're horrid!" cried Eileen.

Over the face of the old man spread a smile. Before it, Eileen's flush of anger became the blush of embarrassment.

"Such a simple trick, too," he chuckled. "I'd hardly have expected two such stern arbiters of right and wrong to be deceived by it. But I suppose that it's easily explainable. You want to reserve the privilege of condemnation of Baird to yourselves, eh? Outsiders are barred." His voice grew serious.

"Listen, children: To act hastily is to act wrongly. And pride continues us in our hasty course. Eileen, look at me! You love Baird. You were ready, a few minutes ago, to put him out of your life forever. But now—are you so ready?"

Her eyes wavered; they sought those of Jimmy. Jimmy was flushed, perspiring of forehead. Somehow, over the picture of Eileen that his eyes held, another picture superimposed itself. It was a picture of Baird meeting Landers' rush. Other pictures swept across a mental canvas. Baird in France, Baird in training-camp— A warm rush of tenderness misted his eyes. The pictures vanished. Through a blur, he saw Eileen. But she was no longer looking at him questioningly. She was staring at his father, her body tense again, but this time with eagerness, not aggression. And Ladd, senior, was saying:

"One act may sometimes be the act by which we can judge a man, Eileen. But this act of Baird's

—can we judge it singly, by itself? Or must we remember that, whether he was a thief, or not under impulse he was redeemed himself? And must not you, Eileen, remember that, after all, your own *beaux yeux* were in part responsible? Not that the blame can be shifted, but—it was for you, Eileen." He suddenly drew out his watch. "He left here almost two hours ago. He went, I imagine, to his rooms. To pack, doubtless. I'd say, if you ever want to see him again——"

Eileen turned to Jimmy. There was no question in her eyes, but, had there been, it would have been answered. For Jimmy spoke.

"We'd better hustle, Eileen."

XXXIII

BAIRD, in his shirt-sleeves, his packing done, looked down upon the thronged street. Home of youth and ambition, the twin ideals of America; home of success, home of opportunity—New York was more than that. It was the frame that held Eileen Elsing. Donchester would have seemed as attractive to him as New York had Eileen Elsing been there. The remotest prairie village, with Eileen—

He wheeled. He reached for his jacket. In ten minutes he would be gone from Derriby's. In an hour, at the utmost, gone from New York, gone from Ladd & Company, from Jimmy, from Eileen. He had one arm through one sleeve, and was struggling with the other when a knock sounded upon the door.

Grannan, of course, he supposed. His mouth tightened grimly. Wounded shoulder and all, it would be pleasant to "knock Grannan for a goal," as the slang of the moment had it. Grannan, the obsequious valet, had been paid by Blackmar to act as spy. Then he shrugged. After all, each man according to his lights. Baird to steal a fortune, Grannan to act as spy!

"Come in," he grunted.

Not noticing, because he did not care, he was on

the threshold of his bedroom before he knew that it was not Grannan who had entered but Eileen. He knew it because of no rustle of her garments, because of no fragrance that emanated from her. He simply *knew* it.

Slowly, meticulously straightening his jacket, he turned. Jimmy was behind her, but he noticed Jimmy only as one would notice the background of a portrait.

She was dressed in the blue tailor-made that she had worn at tea on New Year's day. The jaunty little hat crowned her auburn hair. As before, the very boyishness of her attire but accentuated her lovely femininity. Youth! It was the great outstanding quality of her. She would have it until she died.

For a moment, they stood facing each other. He knew that she knew of his confession to Blackmar, that he stood upon the brink of the most highly emotional moment of his life. She knew it, too. Her eyes that held in their gray clarity a serene confidence suddenly filmed. Even as his dropped, hers turned slightly. Had he spoken at the moment of her entrance, had she spoken, then they would have been swept unresistingly upon the current of emotionalism. But the first tense moment passed silently. By that time, Eileen had remembered that she was a woman of the world, and Baird had remembered that grown men worthy of their manhood do not throw themselves upon the ground and kiss the hem of a woman's skirt, no matter how deeply they may love and have erred.

Their joint pride had suddenly, without a word or movement on the part of either, erected itself between them. Emotionalism could have breached it upon her entrance, but now it was too late. Each felt it, quite without understanding. Helplessly, their eyes averted, each trembling with love one second and the next rigid with pride, they stood there. It was Jimmy Ladd who broke the silence and saved a situation.

"Packing, Rod?"

The commonplace question brought a blaze of color into Baird's cheeks.

"Yes," he answered shortly. There was something of defiance in his tone.

"Going to leave without saying even fare-thee-well, eh?" asked Jimmy. "One grand way of treating a friend, I'll say!"

"Well, what would you have me do?" countered Baird. "You've seen your father?"

"We just left him," replied Jimmy. "He told us we'd better hurry; so—we hustled, didn't we, Eileen?" Her eyes had gained Baird's again. Without removing them, she nodded.

"Yes," she said.

"And came to see me?" asked Baird. The question was to her, not to Jimmy, she knew.

"I'm here, eh?" she retorted.

A moment ago, Baird had thought that he read her eyes, had thought them clear, untroubled. Now they were unfathomable. Pain, delight, woe, or joy—he could not tell what was in them.

The rigidity left his figure. He stirred uneasily.

His eyes left Eileen's and wandered to Jimmy, then back again to the girl.

"Of course—I'd have written," he stammered.

"Written what?" demanded Jimmy.

"Why—er—what I'd done," answered Baird.

"You knew that dad would have told us. Why write it?"

"Well—er——"

"The plain truth is that you couldn't trust Eileen or me, isn't it?" demanded Ladd.

"Trust you?" Baird was bewildered.

"You heard me. I'm the kind of a yellow dog that goes back on a friend because he's in a jam, and Eileen—God knows *what* you thought of her." He snorted indignantly. The sight of Baird, caught in the act of packing, on the eve of a departure that, Jimmy knew, must be permanent, aroused in him feelings that could express themselves only in indignation. He forgot that, only a few minutes ago, he had thought himself willing to let Baird go out of his life. He remembered his father's arguments well enough, but would have claimed their authorship.

"Thought of her?" said Baird. Something of that desperation that was within him came to the surface, was evidenced by his voice, by his expression. "Why, good God, Jimmy—why, Eileen——"

An amateur psychologist Jimmy Ladd certainly was. It is to be doubted if he could have defined the word authoritatively. Yet he had grasped the significance of the tense attitudes of Eileen and Baird a moment ago. He knew that the taut wire sometimes snaps. The spiritual wire of these twain

had *not* snapped, but—it was up to Jimmy to make them break, if possible.

"A lot you thought of her!" he sneered. "Leave me out of it. I don't count. But, Eileen—I never thought you were yellow, Rod."

Baird stared at him.

"What are friends for," went on Jimmy, "but to help each other stand the gaff? And if friends are supposed to do that, what are lovers supposed to do? You make me feel pretty sick, Rod."

Slowly Baird turned to Eileen. He wet his lips with a nervous tongue.

"Do—how do you feel about the matter, Eileen?"

"I'm here, eh?" she said again.

"Here? Yes. But—did Mr. Ladd tell you what I told him? That *I'm* a faker, a cheap imposter, a—a four-flusher, a thief? That I pretended——"

"He told us that you said those things about yourself," she interrupted.

"Well? You believe it, don't you?"

"Talk sense!" snapped Jimmy. "Would we be here if we believed that stuff? Say, Rod, have you beeen kidding the girl?"

"Kidding?" Baird stared again at Jimmy. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand slang? I said 'kidding.' I meant making love to her for the fun of it. Flirting, if that makes it clearer."

"Don't be an ass," said Baird.

"And I say the same thing to you, Roddy me buck. Good Lord above us, look down upon the man! Early-martyr stuff, monks wearing wire

shirts—— Wake up, Rod; you haven't any quarrel with us. We're trying to make friends with you. Don't strike us."

His humor fell miserably flat upon the ears of Baird.

"Please don't be silly, Jimmy," he said.

"Silly? Because we've come down here to—well, what did we come down here for, Eileen? I know that I came to tell Rod that if I heard any more of this nonsense about his leaving Ladd & Company, I'd bust him one on the ear. What did you come down for, Eileen?"

She hesitated a moment. The blush that was in her cheeks spread to her forehead, her throat.

"To tell him," she said, with the least catch in her voice, "that if I heard any more of this nonsense about his leaving me, I'd bust him one on the ear."

"Right!" said Jimmy. "Eileen, go bust him. As for me, I've scruples. I can't stand by and watch a healthy young female mistreat a wounded male. I—just can't do it, so—be careful of his shoulder, Eileen."

He was through the door and it had closed behind him before they comprehended his intention. Eileen glanced at the closed door. Suddenly she trembled. She took a step after Jimmy. And then Baird was beside her.

"Eileen!" She turned. He was close to her. She put a hand against a chair to steady herself. "Eileen!" he said again.

Then she met his eyes, so close to hers that their

faces almost touched. She moved a step back, still clinging to the chair.

"Well, Rod?"

"Did Jimmy—do you—mean that——" He paused, helplessly.

"You know that I love you," she said.

"I knew that you did."

"Would I change overnight, do you think?" He shrugged.

"But I'd changed. You wouldn't, but—I'm not the man you thought I was."

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Surely yesterday you didn't think me a thief, Eileen?"

"Certainly not; but—to say that you're not the man I thought you were—what does that signify? Do any of us remain stationary in the eyes of those who know us? We must move."

"But to move backward!" She shook her head.

"To move backward and *stay* there! You didn't do that, Rod." He breathed heavily.

"That's—white of you, Eileen. But—I have no money, Eileen."

"Perhaps I've moved, Rod."

His eyes were puzzled.

"I mean," she explained, "that perhaps money doesn't mean so much."

"You've inherited a fortune," he reminded her. She colored angrily.

"Meaning, I suppose, that if I hadn't I'd not be here, that I'd be making eyes at Jimmy Ladd per-

haps. That I'm so money-hungry that money alone counts——"

"I didn't mean that, Eileen," he protested.

"You did! You're hateful! You're horrid! You're—I come down here practically begging you to marry me and——" She stopped, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing. "Why, if I hadn't a penny, and you hadn't a penny, I'd go to the ends of the earth——"

"With me?" he asked gently.

The fire left her eyes. She averted them. Her lower lips trembled.

"I—why, if you——" Her voice broke.

He drew close to her now, so close that his shoulder touched hers.

"Eileen," he said, "you know what I've done. You know—*do* you know that never again——"

"Rod, you don't have to make *promises*. If I didn't know, do you think that I'd be here?"

"And you don't think that I—that I'm *really* a thief?" She lifted her face suddenly.

"I think you're ambitious, Rod; I think that you're in a hurry to achieve. But a thief—why, you went to Sam, didn't you? And you went to Mr. Ladd. I don't know what more—— You wanted to run away, to punish yourself, but also to punish Jimmy, who's fond of you; to punish me, who loves you. And *we'd* done nothing, had we? If you still want to punish Jimmy, want to punish me——"

"Eileen; you know that I can't tell it to you how much I love you. And if you can forgive me?"

"Forgive you, Rod? You've done nothing to me.

It was to Blackmar. And you have squared accounts with him."

"Not completely," he admitted.

"But you will. Restitution and confession—what more can be demanded?"

"But the character of a man who deceives you so. Can you forgive that?" he persisted. She smiled, mischievously.

"Rod, if you punished people because they deceived us about their characters—— Shall we fail the girl who uses rouge to indicate to her friends that she adores the golf-links and thus achieved her complexion? Rod, we can't permanently deceive people as to our characters. Forgive you? Rod, I'll do much better by you than that. I'll love you."

Jimmy knocked twice. He received no answer. So he went back to the banister in the hall outside and perched upon it, and smoked another cigarette. After all, the office was closed now; it was Saturday afternoon. He had no place in particular to go. And they ought to have a chaperon lurking somewhere outside, anyway. Moreover, if they thought, just because they'd fixed matters up, that they were going to have the day to themselves, they had another guess coming to them. They were going to do their just share of entertaining him. They were going to luncheon together. He could wait.

THE END